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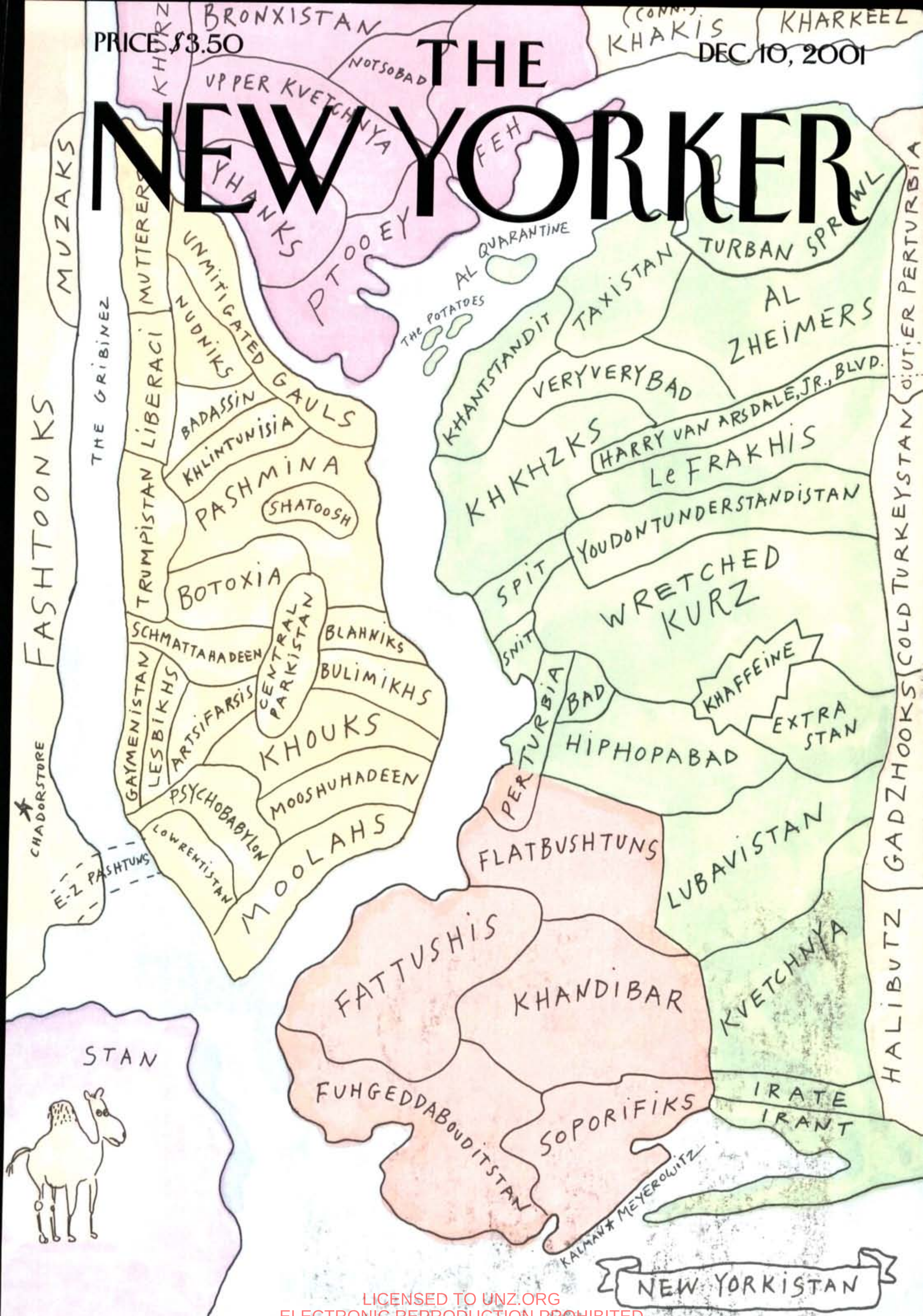
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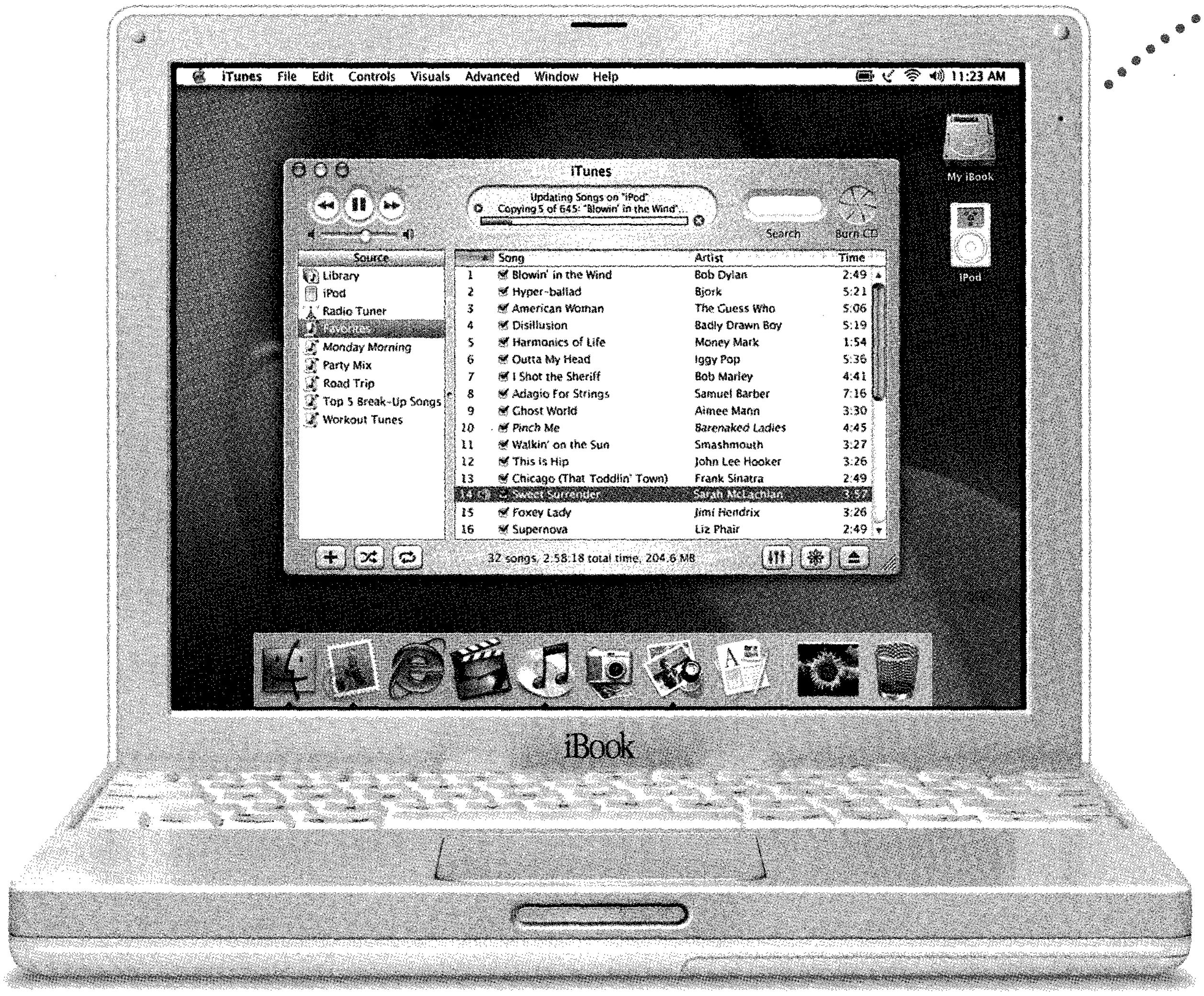
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Top 5 Break-Up Songs
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iBook

	Song	Artist	Time
1	Blowin' in the Wind	Bob Dylan	2:49
2	Hyper-ballad	Bjork	5:21
3	American Woman	The Guess Who	5:06
4	Disillusion	Badly Drawn Boy	5:19
5	Harmonics of Life	Money Mark	1:54
6	Outta My Head	Iggy Pop	5:36
7	I Shot the Sheriff	Bob Marley	4:41
8	Adagio For Strings	Samuel Barber	7:16
9	Ghost World	Aimee Mann	3:30
10	Pinch Me	Barenaked Ladies	4:45
11	Walkin' on the Sun	Smashmouth	3:27
12	This is Hip	John Lee Hooker	3:26
13	Chicago (That Toddlin' Town)	Frank Sinatra	2:49
14	Sweet Surrender	Sarah McLachlan	3:57
15	Foxey Lady	Jimi Hendrix	3:26
16	Supernova	Liz Phair	2:49

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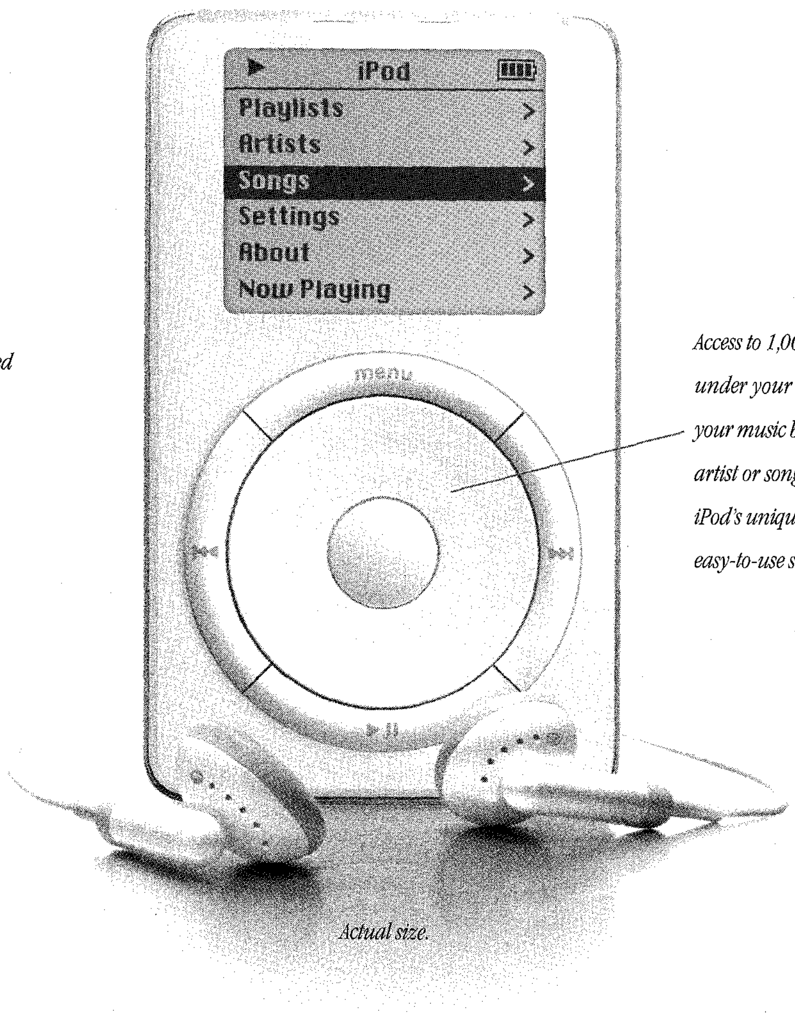

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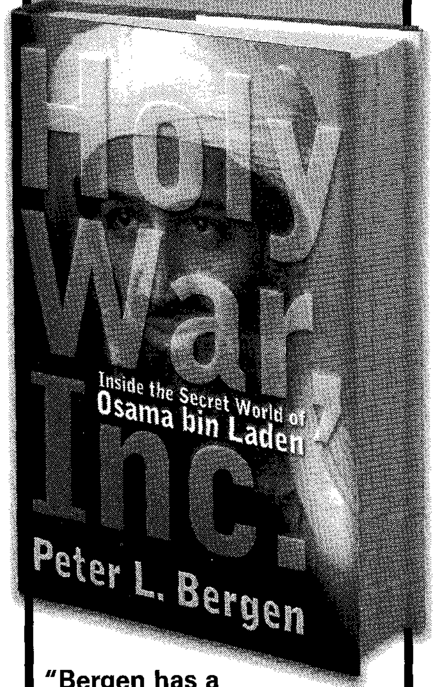

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—Ethan Bronner, *The New York Times Book Review*

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—*The Wall Street Journal*

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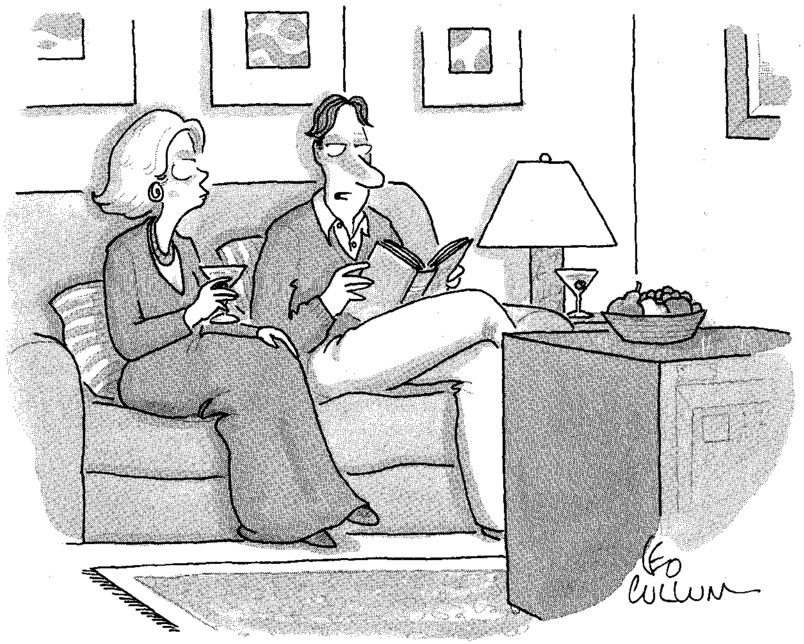
Ben Greenman (Pop Music, p. 112) edits the Goings On About Town section. A collection of his short fiction, "Superbad," was published last month. ♦



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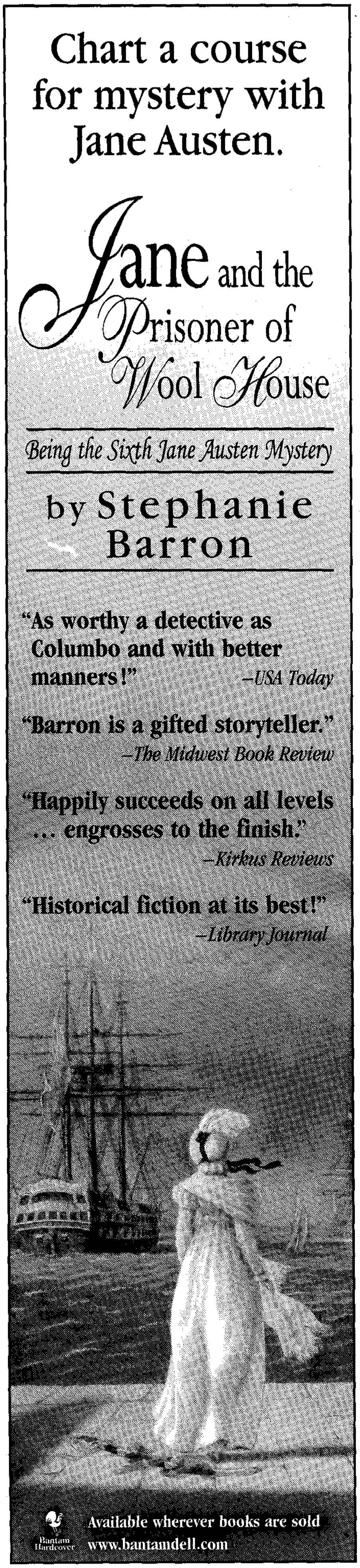
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MODERN WOMEN

In his Profile of Kirk Varnedoe, the head of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, Calvin Tomkins cites Glenn Lowry, MOMA's current director, for breaking down the "old boy network" and giving women top jobs and a voice ("The Modernist," November 5th). This ignores an earlier, important tradition of women in management positions at the museum, including Dorothy C. Miller, who retired in 1969 as senior curator of painting and sculpture, having joined the staff in 1934 as assistant to the founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Miller was responsible for the renowned series of "Americans" exhibitions at MOMA between 1942 and 1963, often described as an abbreviated *Who's Who* of artists in those years. Miller always made a point of praising Barr's philosophy of promoting women staffers, encouraging them to be independent and take on complex assignments—and to take the resultant credit for work well done, sometimes at his own expense.

Reid White
Lenox, Mass.

ISLAM AND ITS BATTLES

Bernard Lewis, in his attempt to explicate the "historical quality" of the hostility toward America in Khomeini's Iran and elsewhere in the Islamic world, reaches back several centuries, invoking the essentialist notion of an Islam bent on dominating other countries ("The Revolt of Islam," November 19th). This explanation neglects more recent events, such as C.I.A. involvement in the overthrow in 1953 of the democratically elected government of Iran, and the reinstatement of a regime seen as more favorably disposed to Western interests. The subsequent brutality of that regime toward its own people was a major factor in bringing Khomeini to power. The horrific events of September 11th and their aftermath have demonstrated the danger in substituting stereotypes for historical analysis; at least in Iran, a specific history, and not a timeless hostility to "the West," underlies the suspicion with which America is still viewed.

Frank Mellor
Washington, D.C.

Lewis's account underplays the role of the many divisions within Islam in its conflicts with the West. Beyond the basic split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, which has had fatal consequences, there are sharp divisions along ethnic, linguistic, tribal, and even extended-family lines. The internal wars of both the West and Islam seem to have been as frequent and as bloody as those they have fought against each other. It is often when one is seen as taking sides in the other's battles—as with our support of the House of Saud—that tensions explode. It is worth noting, however, that the concept of a tie binding the People of the Book—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—has been important historically in the Middle East, and contributed to Muslim tolerance of Jews during the Spanish Inquisition; if it were allowed to, this bond might contribute to our understanding of each other today.

Richard Wandschneider
Joseph, Ore.

Nasra Hassan's piece on suicide bombers in Gaza and the West Bank is a riveting illumination of the terrorist mind—the mind of someone already dead inside who cares nothing about inflicting death on innocent people ("An Arsenal of Believers," November 19th). The desperation she portrays has an infectious, and even seductive, quality for its adherents; one wonders whether the Palestinians' leaders will ever be able to replace the thrill of heroic immolation with the humdrum stasis of national self-rule.

Gary Weinstein
Fayetteville, N.Y.

•

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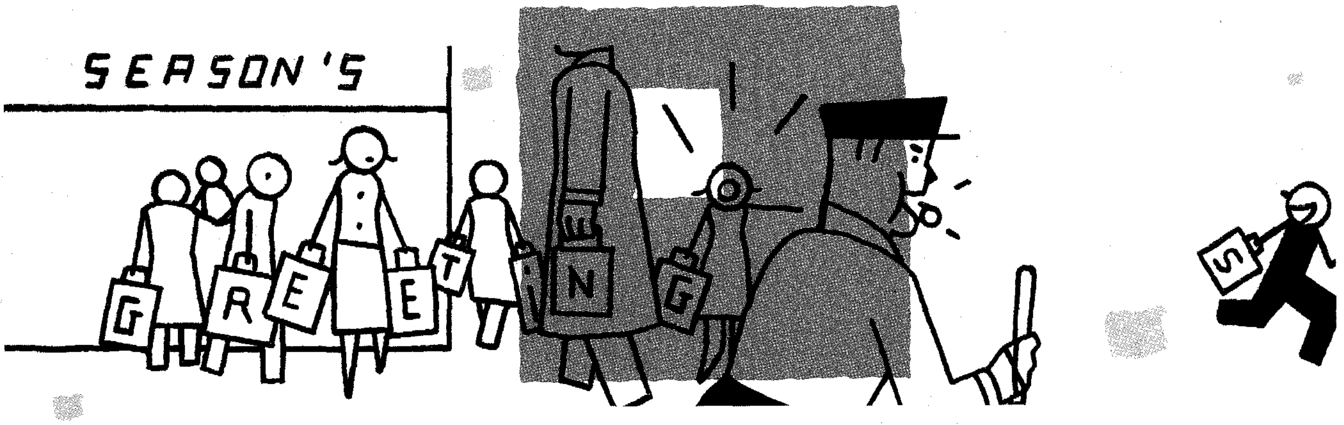

LAURENT CILLUFFO

THE HOLIDAYS

"THE RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR"
Long legs, live animals, and Santa, set to music. (Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Through Dec. 29.)

"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"
Tim Curry takes the role of Scrooge in this year's musical version of the holiday classic. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 307-4111. Through Dec. 27.) ♦ Charles Dickens's original manuscript is on display at the Morgan Library through Jan. 13. (29 E. 36th St. 685-0008.)

WINTER SOLSTICE
The Native American percussionist Valerie Dee Naranjo, the Armenian vocalist and percussionist Arto Tuncboyaciyan, and the African-American women of Forces of Nature Dance Theatre help Paul Winter mark the changing of the season. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 662-2133. Dec. 13-14 at 7:30 and Dec. 15 at 2 and 7:30.)

THE NUTCRACKER
The New York City Ballet offers eight performances a week of Balanchine's epic, through the end of the month (for more information, see Dance). ♦ Two more plummy versions are also available. "The Yorkville Nutcracker," choreographed by Francis Patrelle, transposes the action to New York. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Dec. 6-7 at 7, Dec. 8 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 9 at 2.) ♦ An hour-long child-friendly version by the New York Theatre Ballet goes on pointe at Florence Gould Hall. (55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Dec. 7 and Dec. 14 at 10:30 A.M., 1, and 7 and Dec. 8-9, Dec. 15-16, and Dec. 22-23 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30.)

JEAN COCTEAU REPERTORY
A presentation of Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," adapted by the Cocteau's artistic director David Fuller, featuring live sound effects and audience participation to keep the kids busy. A holiday reception follows the performance. (Jean Cocteau Repertory, 330 Bowery. 677-0060. Dec. 15 at 2.)

BREAD AND PUPPET THEATRE
The left-wing company, famous for its huge papier-mâché puppets, presents "The Insurrection Mass," a very secular "public participation uprising" made in response to the events of September 11th. Leave the kids at home. (Theatre for a New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Dec. 6-9 at 8; through Dec. 23. ♦ **Note:** A circus event for families runs every Saturday and Sunday at 3, beginning Dec. 8 and closing on Dec. 23.)

KIKI & HERB: THERE'S A STRANGER IN THE MANGER!
Just in time for the holidays, a fresh dose of cabaret satire from the duo otherwise known as Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

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CHRISTMAS WITH THE CRAWFORDS
Joey Arias portrays Joan Crawford, in an encore staging of the Artfull Circle Theatre's drag satire. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 439-5135.)

HANUKKAH
Starting on Dec. 9 at 5:30, the first flame will grace the thirty-two-foot menorah at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street. New lights will be added over the next seven evenings, and there'll be music, dancing, and hot potato pancakes on the first and final nights. (For more information, call 736-8400.)

HOLIDAY TUNES
The three-woman operation known as Betty unleashes its high-wire-without-a-net cabaret act in a seasonal show featuring such guest musicians and storytellers as Toshi Reagon, Dan Zane, Sean Altman, and others. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Saturdays at 8:30, through Dec. 28.) ♦ The former Bongos front man Richard Barone leads an abridged version of Handel's "Messiah" with the help of Jane Siberry, Tony Trischka, David Johansen, and many others. (Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. 228-6300. Dec. 14-15 at 7:30 and 10:30.)

MORE HOLIDAY MUSIC

"MESSIAH"
St. Thomas Episcopal Church, with its celebrated choir of men and boys, gives one of the best presentations of Handel's oratorio in the city, with the early-music group Concert Royal and soloists. (For information about tickets, call 664-9360. Dec. 18 and Dec. 20 at 7:30.) The choir also offers two presentations of a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, a meditative service of Bible readings and music in the best Anglican tradition. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. Dec. 23 at 11 A.M. and 4.) ♦ Another topnotch "Messiah" is performed by Musica Sacra, directed by Richard Westenburg. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 18 at 8.) ♦ The thirty-fourth annual "Messiah Sing-In" lets the audience, up to three thousand strong, be the chorus; bring a score, or buy one at the door. (Avery Fisher Hall. 333-5333. Dec. 20 at 8.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
The Met hosts a variety of holiday concerts, all taking place before the museum's great Christmas tree in the medieval Sculpture Hall. Dec. 9: No one does a better choral Christmas than the virtuoso male voices of Chanticleer, who sing a program ranging from medieval sacred works to spirituals and carols. ♦ Dec. 12: The New York Big Brass play favorite works by Bizet, Tchaikovsky, Gabrieli, and others. ♦ Dec. 16: New Haven's Trinity Boys Choir sings Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols." ♦ Dec. 19: The countertenor Derek Lee Ragin joins the musicians of the Aulos Ensemble for a program of Bach, Vivaldi, Couperin, Rameau, and carols. ♦ Dec. 20: The Four Nations Ensemble offers "Enchanted Nights," vocal and instrumental music by Corrette ("Noëls" for strings and harpsichord), Byrd, Biber, and others. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. All concerts are presented at 6:30 and 8:30.)

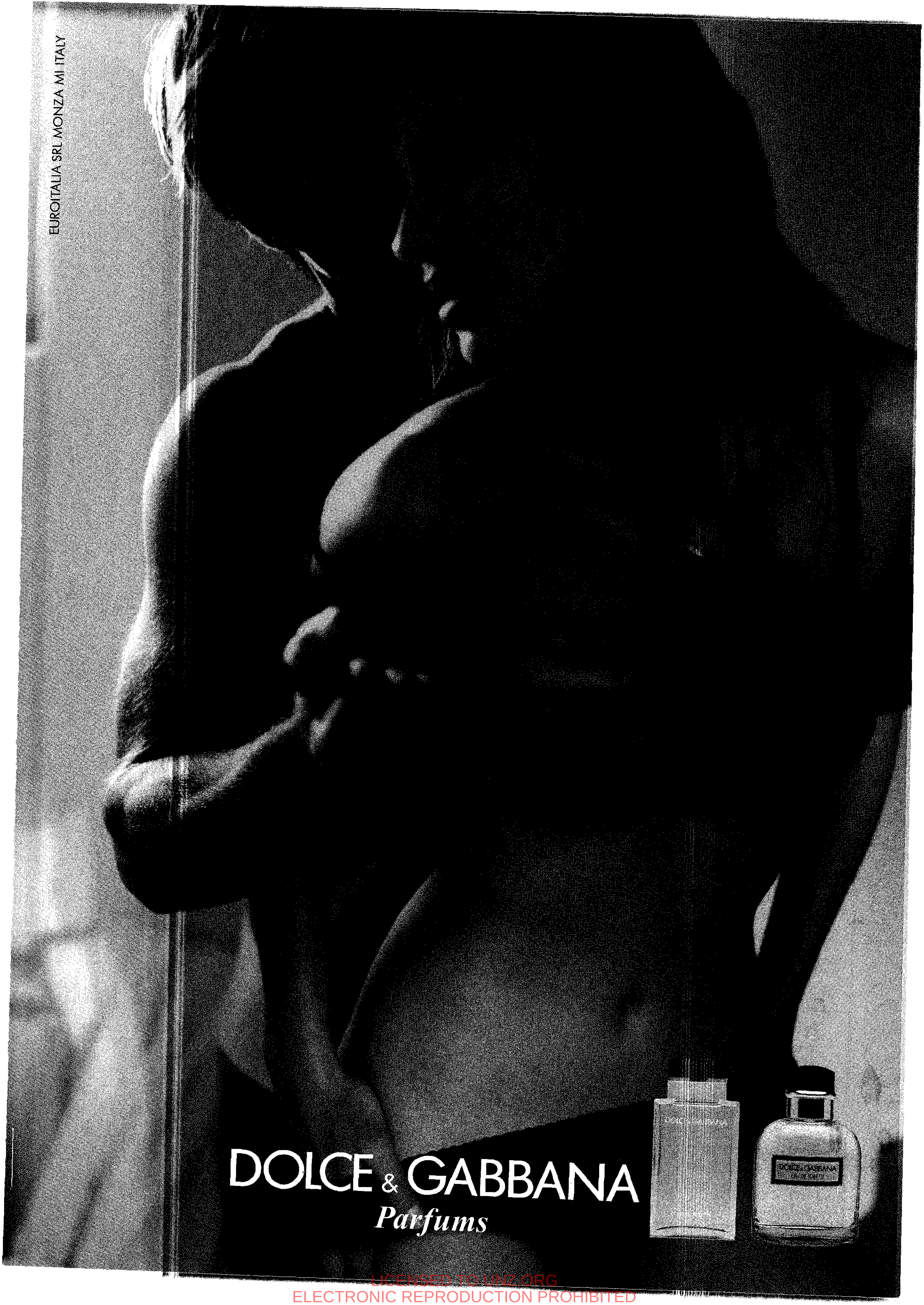
AVERY FISHER HALL
Dec. 16 at 3: The Principal Brass Quintet of the New York Philharmonic gets together with the Canadian Brass, the clown princes of pops concerts, for a holiday program. ♦ Dec. 22 at 8: J. Walter Turnbull leads the Boys Choir of Harlem in a selection of holiday favorites, with members of the Philharmonic lending a hand. ♦ Dec. 23 at 7:30: The Klezmer Conservatory Band offers a "Klezmerfest" of traditional Jewish music. (721-6500.)

HANDEL'S "JUDAS MACCABAEUS"
A new Hanukkah version for young audiences of the majestic oratorio, with added narration by Karl Kirchwey. Ken Masur conducts the Bach Society of Columbia University and the Young People's Chorus of New York City. (92nd St. Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Dec. 9 at 3.)

"NOVA: A MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS"
The Ensemble for Early Music returns to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for its popular series of holiday concerts. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 280-0330. Dec. 7-8 at 8 and Dec. 25 at 3 and 8.)

VIENNA CHOIR BOYS
The legendary ensemble comes back to Carnegie Hall, singing music by Britten, Mendelssohn, Richard Rodgers, and others. (247-7800. Dec. 9 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK STRING ORCHESTRA
Carnegie Hall's proud holiday tradition, a convocation of young virtuosos conducted by Jaime Laredo. Dec. 24 at 7: Music by Mozart, including the Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major (with Leon Fleisher). ♦ Dec. 28 at 8: The cellist Sharon Robinson and the pianist Joseph Kalichstein join the ensemble for a program of Britten, Beethoven (the "Triple Concerto") and Mendelssohn. (247-7800.)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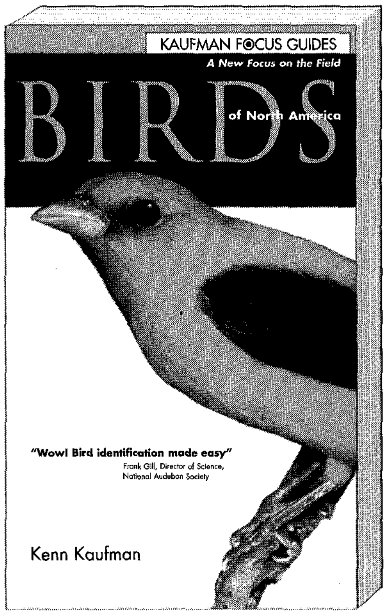
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HOMEBODY/KABUL
Tony Kushner's latest play, set in London and in Kabul in 1998, about a woman who becomes obsessed with Afghanistan. Declan Donnellan is the director. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

OTHELLO
Keith David has the title role and Liev Schreiber is Iago in the Public Theatre's staging of Shakespeare's tragedy. Doug Hughes is the director. In previews through Dec. 8. Opens Dec. 9 at 7. (425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

PSYCH
In Evan Smith's new comedy, a psychology grad student who moonlights as a dominatrix is seized by paranoia. Staged by Playwrights Horizons. In previews. (Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AND GOD CREATED GREAT WHALES
Rinde Eckert stars in an encore staging of his two-character musical-theatre work, in which a composer struggles to finish an opera based on "Moby-Dick" before he succumbs to a degenerative disease. (45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 253-9983.)

BY JEEVES
There's no stopping the unrelenting bonhomie of this lame amusement by Alan Ayckbourn and Andrew Lloyd Webber, in which P. G. Wodehouse's shambolic Bertie Wooster (John Scherer) and his ingenious, haughty factotum, Jeeves (well played by Martin Jarvis), take the stage. Lloyd Webber's melodies are generic, and Ayckbourn, who, as the director, works manfully to whip a little fun into this listless tale, is less persuasive as a lyricist. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/12/01.) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE OF DEATH
Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen square off in Strindberg's depiction of the blasted heath of matrimony, and they do battle magnificently. Mirren, playing a former actress (if there is such a thing as a former actress), is droll and wicked, and McKellen, in his deep embrace of the role of an army captain who comes face to face with his own mortality, is a life force. Directed by Sean Mathias. (10/22/01) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

DRUMMER WANTED
In Richard Maxwell's latest play, a loner and percussionist ponders personal-injury law after he is hit by a car. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5933. Closes Dec. 23.)

ELAINE STRITCH AT LIBERTY
In her extraordinary one-woman show (co-created with *The New Yorker's* theatre critic John Lahr), the Broadway star once and for all confirms her status as a living legend as she sings songs and tells tales about the ups and downs of her long life in the theatre (her first break, as Ethel Merman's understudy in "Call Me Madam," her iconic turn in Stephen Sondheim's "Company," her struggles with booze and with love). But terrific songs, hilarious gossip, and intimate confessions aside, Stritch, with her inimitable voice and uncanny timing, ends up capturing more than a single lifetime. Instead her show is the synthesis of so much that is rich and rewarding and heartbreaking about life on the stage. George Wolfe is the director. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Dec. 30.)

EVERETT BEEKIN
Richard Greenberg's play enacts one family's journey from the gritty sidewalks of the Lower East Side in the nineteen-forties to the bland promised land of California in the nineties, where, as one character says, "the afternoons are eighteen hours long." Along the way, much is lost. Robin Bartlett and Bebe Neuwirth play two sisters whose sense of disconnectedness is such that it is as though they were cursed by words uttered by their grandmother before they were even born: "My daughters, let me advise you one thing: don't be related to nobody." Greenberg is articulate in evoking a melancholy that goes beyond words, as he was in his masterly "Three Days of Rain" a few years ago, but this time the work doesn't cut as deep—it's a portrait of devastation done in pastels instead of oils. Directed by Evan Yionoulis. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

45 SECONDS FROM BROADWAY
Neil Simon is in his element in his new comedy, which is part love letter, part elegy to a Broadway that ain't what it used to be. Set in the legendary coffee shop of the Edison Hotel, in the heart of the theatre district, the play revolves around a loud, successful comedian named Mickey Fox (Lewis J. Stadlen), who is squarely based on Jackie Mason, and it's peopled by the kind of characters you might run into at the real Cafe Edison, among them a producer; a couple of matinée ladies; a peculiar, mysterious couple; a novice actress; and a struggling playwright. Simon has the dynamics of the place right, but the humor here is superficial and stale—it's canned chicken soup whose expiration date has long passed. The cast, directed by Jerry Zaks, includes Louis Zorich and Rebecca Schull as the benevolent owners of the coffee shop, Bill Moor, David Margulies, and Marian Seldes. (11/26/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

HEDDA GABLER
This "Hedda," starring Kate Burton, is all surface brightness—it twinkles rather than burns. Jon Robin Baitz's colloquial adaptation of Ibsen's drama leaves little room for shading or depth, and the entire cast suffers under Nicholas Martin's heavy-handed and misguided direction, as does the audience. (10/22/01) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

IPHIGENEIA AT AULIS
The Pearl Theatre Company's staging of Euripides' tragedy. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Dec. 16.)

IRISH REPERTORY THEATRE
"The Streets of New York," Charlotte Moore's musical adaptation of the nineteenth-century Irish playwright Dion Boucicault's drama. Through Dec. 30. ♦ "That and the Cup of Tea: An Evening with Carmel Quinn," a new one-woman show starring the Irish singer and storyteller. Through Dec. 9. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

LISTEN HOUDINI
This new play, conceived and written by the Axis Company, dramatizes the lengthy debate carried on in 1926 by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who fervently believed in spiritualism, and Harry Houdini, a determined skeptic. The production brings to life the bygone age when *Scientific American* still pursued such subjects, but it also lays out the terms of a debate that is still going on. Thanks to a subtle performance by B. Barnhart, as a psychic, the show, directed by Randy Sharp, convincingly blurs the line between psychics as scammers and as true mystics; it also points out that the messages that psychics would carry if they could communicate with the dead wouldn't necessarily be the comforting ones most people seek. The arguments aren't new, but seeing them from Houdini's point of view—as a man used to mystifying others solely through his own efforts—brings them to fresh life. (1 Sheridan Sq. 807-9300. Closes Dec. 22.)

LITTLE HAM
A musical based on the Langston Hughes play, which is set in Harlem in 1936. With music by Judd Woldin, lyrics by Richard Engquist and Mr. Woldin, and a book by Dan Owens. (Hudson Guild Theatre, 441 W. 26th St. 563-2565. Closes Dec. 9.)

MAMMA MIA!
This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between the band's No. 1 singles. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

MARC SALEM'S MIND GAMES, TOO
The "mentalist and mind artist" returns to New York with more experiments in nonverbal communication. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

METAMORPHOSES
Ovid said, "All things change, nothing perishes," and Mary Zimmerman's fluid and beautiful interpretation of several legends from his fifteen-book history of the world is reassuring proof. Her modern staging, which charmingly and wittily incorporates colloquial language and costumes that range across time, confirms the enduring and elemental power of myth. Here, real love, thwarted, begets love in other forms; kindness is rewarded in unexpected ways; and evil often backfires. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
It's gimmick Shakespeare, and it really works. The accomplished Aquila Theatre Company has set the Bard's comedy in London in an "Avengers"-influenced swinging sixties. The story is advanced with the help of some go-go choreography, and "Hey Nonny Nonny" sung to a bossa-nova beat is just plain cool. What is not at all tricked up is the language, which is beautifully spoken, dramatically revealing, and crystalline in effect. (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 239-6200.)

NOISES OFF
Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," all the members of the excellent cast shine in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. Frayn's construction requires spot-on comic timing, and with the help of Sams this production delivers it—and then some. The laughs rumble through the audience from start to finish. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

PETER PAN
The Irondale Ensemble Project's staging of J. M. Barrie's dramatic fantasy, under the direction of Jim Niesen, focusses on the play's original darkness. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 718-488-9233.)

POETRY
Lou Reed (book, music, and lyrics) and Robert Wilson (direction and design) have teamed up with Hamburg's Thalia Theatre for a musical inspired by the life and work of Edgar Allan Poe. Dec. 4-7 at 7:30 and Dec. 8 at 2 and 7:30. Performances are in German and English with English surtitles. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS
It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and David (Friendy) Friend, profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show," but it's still a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

QED
Peter Parnell's play, starring Alan Alda as the physicist Richard Feynman, buzzes with life—a fitting quality for a play about a man who was living proof of the idea that "everything is interesting if you look at it deeply enough." Set in 1986—the year of the Challenger explosion, whose causes Feynman helped to investigate—"QED" (the title comes from the theory of quantum electrodynamics, for which Feynman won the Nobel Prize, in 1965) takes us through an afternoon and evening in Feynman's office at Caltech, where he talks about such subjects as photons, drumming, the Manhattan Project, cancer, and "South Pacific."

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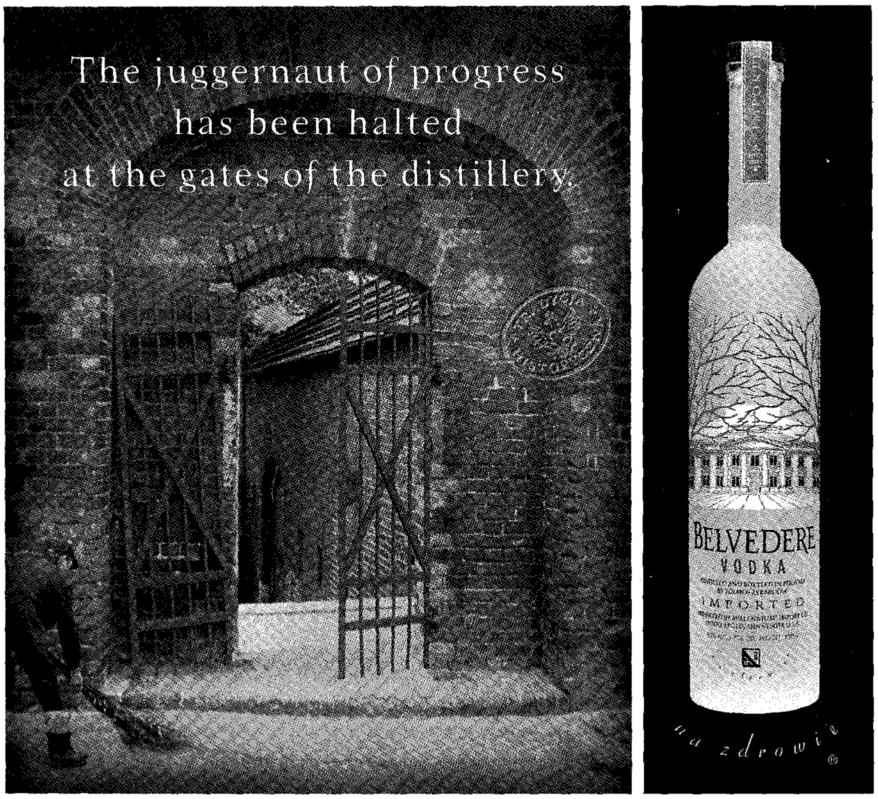

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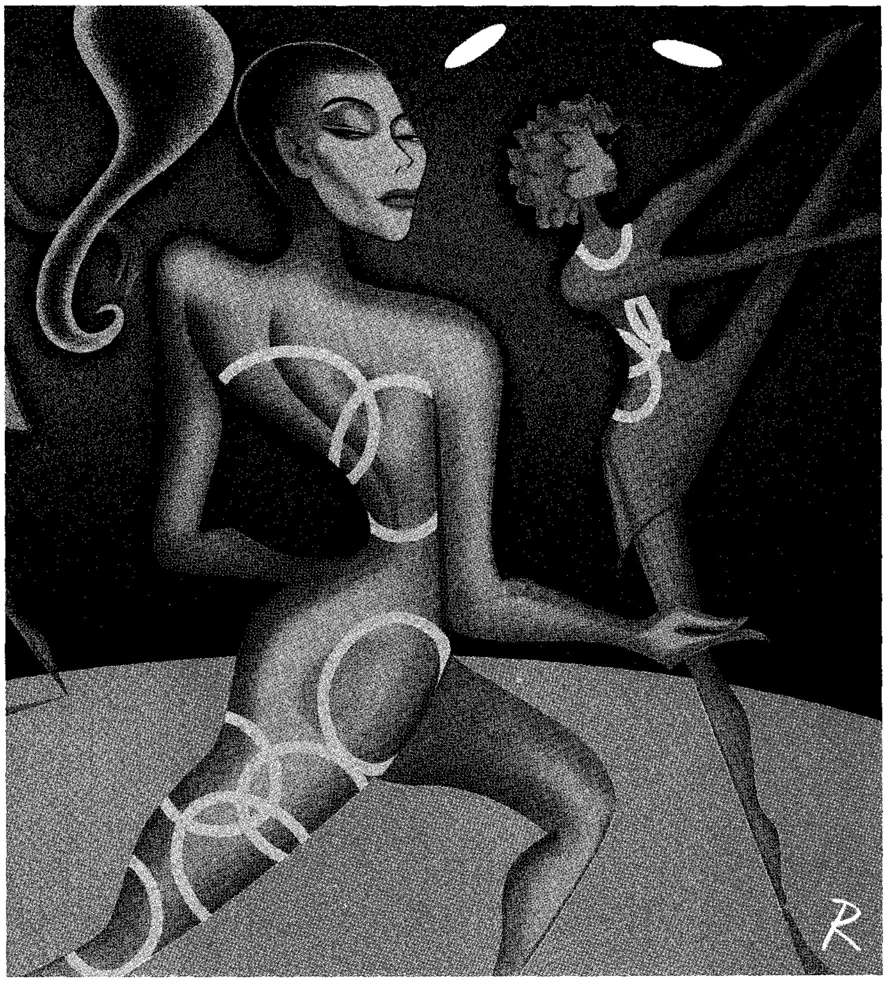
Alda's performance, which makes much use of that scrunchy-eyed smile of his, is one of utter charm. Directed by Gordon Davidson, and also with Kellie Overbey as one of Feynman's students. Sundays and Mondays only. (11/26/01) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Dec. 17. Reopens Feb. 17.)

ROADSIDE
From the York Theatre Company, Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt's new musical, set in a travelling tent show in the Old West. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY
John Leguizamo's new solo show. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE SHAPE OF THINGS
Gretchen Mol, Paul Rudd, Rachel Weisz, and Frederick Weller are in the cast of the Almeida Theatre Company staging of Neil LaBute's latest play. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

SHINY HOT NIGHTS: MORE SONGS OF JONI MITCHELL
The performance artist John Kelly stars in a follow-up to his 1997 one-man paean to the singer. Saturdays at 8. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680.)



The Ailey company in "Here . . . Now," honoring the life of Florence Griffith-Joyner.

ROBERT RISKO

[SIC]
Soho Rep kicks off the season with a comedy by Melissa James Gibson about a trio of aging prodigies. (46 Walker St. 479-7979. Closes Dec. 22.)

SPEAKING IN TONGUES
In the terrifically engaging opening scene of Andrew Bovell's play, in which four characters are talking almost simultaneously, no one is possessed and no one is blathering. They are all, however, on the verge of cheating on their spouses. The director, Mark Clements, has directed Bovell's fuguelike script with wit and command, so everyone, the audience included, gets the sincere, if desperate, attempt to communicate. After the flashy opening, the playwright's motifs of loneliness, betrayal, and need complicate, interweave, and deepen. Characters only speculated about in Act I become flesh in Act II, others are introduced, one reappears. The players—Karen Allen, Kevin Anderson, Margaret Colin, and Michel R. Gill—have the chops to pull off all nine parts impressively, so every scene delivers an unexpected wrinkle, an unfolding surprise. Bovell achieves something rare in the theatre these days: a tense wonderment about how it's all going to play out, an effect enhanced by Richard Hoover's mirrored set and Elaine J. McCarthy's moody photographic projections. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA
Spalding Gray performs a "rework in progress" of his 1984 one-man show, about his experience working as an actor on location in the movie "The Killing Fields." Dec. 10-12 at 8. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

THOU SHALT NOT
The psychological thriller "Thérèse Raquin" was Émile Zola's first experiment in naturalism; this ambitious musical retelling of the novel, by Susan Stroman (the director and choreographer), David Thompson (who wrote the book), and Harry Connick, Jr. (who wrote the music), is an experiment in Expressionism. Stroman wants dance to be the narrative engine of the musical, but it seems inadequate to the brooding psychology of Zola's lovers, Laurent (the strapping and charismatic Craig Bierko) and Thérèse (Kate Levering). What Zola imagined as the heart's wilderness Stroman and her team re-create as a theme park of self-destruction. (11/5/01) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

TRUE LOVE
The second installment in Charles L. Mee's love series, a trilogy based on Greek tragedies, is set in an abandoned gas station in the present. (The Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 239-6200.)

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL
This one-man show, written by Glen Berger and performed by T. Ryder Smith, manages to be both a funny tale of a Dutch librarian's midlife crisis and a serious, intriguing look at the value of any one life. After a book is returned to the library a hundred and thirteen years overdue, the librarian becomes obsessed with finding out how and why. He eventually comes to believe that the Wandering Jew was the errant borrower, whose late return of the volume is one of a series of clues he's left in a desperate attempt to document his existence. Whether the audience buys this or not is irrelevant—it's the power of the librarian's belief that he can create a meaningful whole out of a few bits of ephemera that's being explored. Either way, the play is certainly, as billed, "An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences." Directed by Randy White. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN
The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE
John van Druten's 1943 romantic comedy about an actress and a soldier who have both sworn off love. (Mint Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231.)

WHERE'S MY MONEY?
John Patrick Shanley's dark comedy about two bush-league divorce lawyers from Brooklyn. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE WOMEN
Scott Elliott directs a cast that includes Kristen Johnston, Rue McClanahan, Cynthia Nixon, Jennifer Tilly, Mary Louise Wilson, and Jennifer Coolidge, in Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 satire. With costumes by Isaac Mizrahi. (11/19/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes Dec. 30.)

WONDER OF THE WORLD
A farcical saga of a manic faux-naïve chatterbox, Cass (the fetching and excellent Sarah Jessica Parker), who goes to Niagara Falls in search of a new life after leaving her husband of seven years, Kip (Alan Tudyk). The playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's soi-disant wacky humor offers no revelations, no admissions, no questions, only startling juxtapositions. The show's one incidental delight is the touching Kevin Chamberlin, as Captain Mike, the Niagara tour-boat guide who falls for Cass. (11/12/01) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Performances of "The Nutcracker" continue. The boys and girls at the Christmas party are full of Russian verve and pluck in Balanchine's version, and his candies, fairies, and flowers are fragrant with the bloom of romance. In "The Nutcracker," Tchaikovsky was at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine rose to meet him. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Dec. 4-6 at 6, Dec. 7 at 8, Dec. 8 at 2 and 8, Dec. 9 at 1 and 5, and Dec. 11 at 6. Through Dec. 31.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
Dec. 4 at 8: "Revelations" and excerpts from other works by Ailey. ♦ Dec. 5 at 8: "Phases," "Dance at the Gym," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 6 at 8: "Chocolate Sessions," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Double Exposure," and "Caravan." ♦ Dec. 7 at 8: "Here . . . Now." Judith Jamison's commission for the 2002 Winter Olympics is meant to honor

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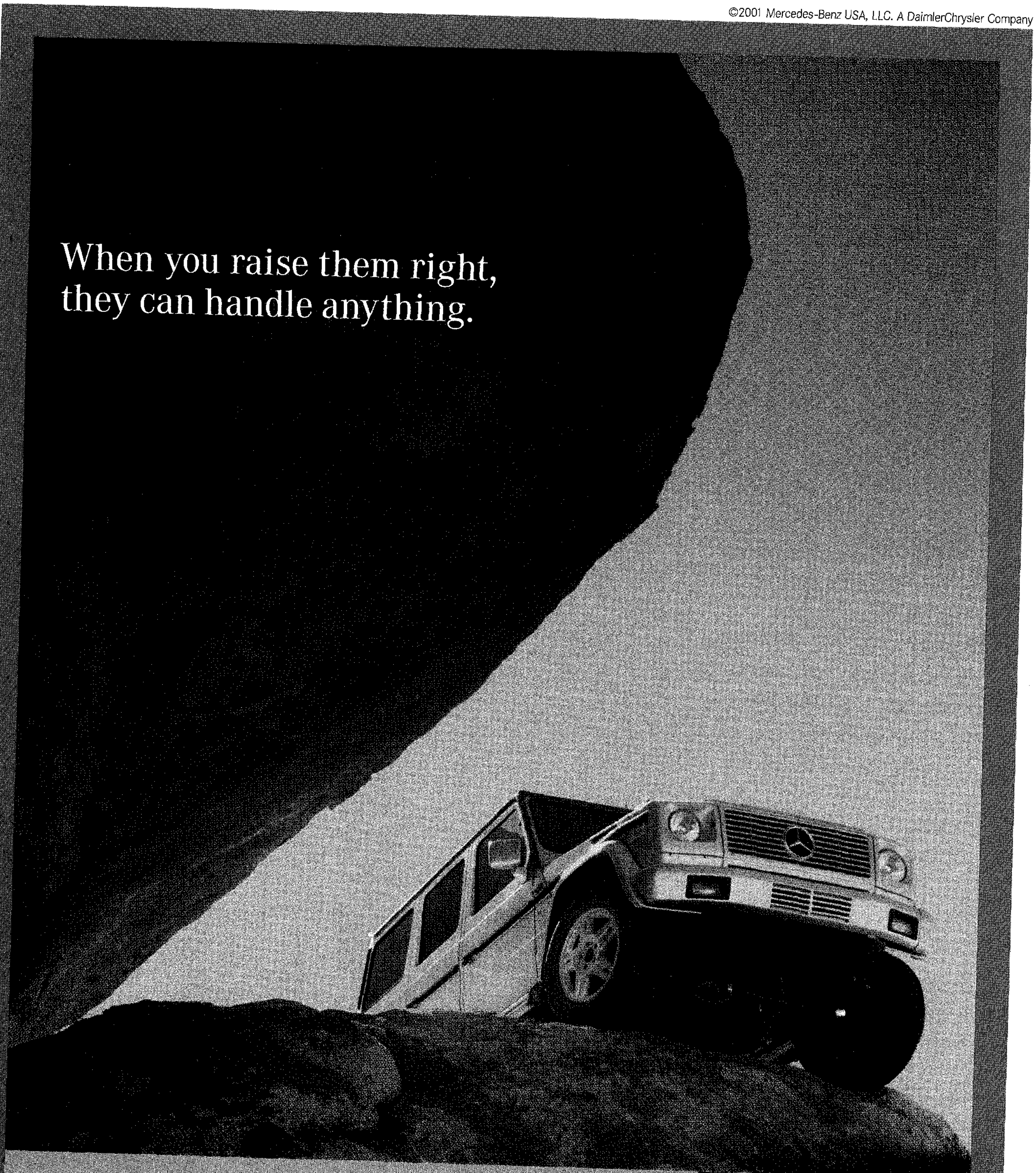

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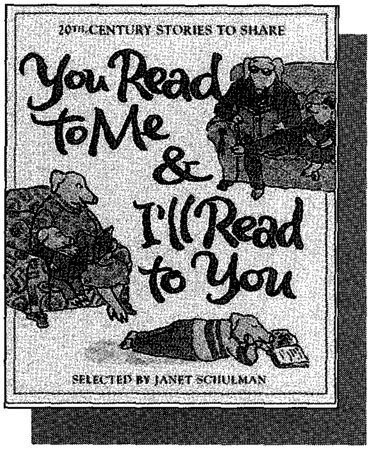
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the sprinter Florence Griffith-Joyner—as famous for her one-legged bodysuits, extra-long painted nails, and wild hair as for her Olympian speed and sudden death. But Jamison doesn't get into all that. With Wynton Marsalis's cool-blue score gliding and ticking and sidling along, "Here . . . Now" ends up celebrating instead the sweet and surprising grace of jazz. In ensemble work and duets, the six dancers respond to the music's subtle moves with elegant athleticism. "Revelations" and "Memoria" complete the program. ♦ Dec. 8 at 2: "Phases," "Dance at the Gym," and "Caravan." ♦ Dec. 8 at 8: "Revelations" and excerpts from other works by Ailey. ♦ Dec. 9 at 3: "Blues Suite," "Cry," "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 9 at 7:30: "Blues Suite," "Here . . . Now," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: "Dance at the Gym," "Shelter," and "Caravan." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Dec. 31.)

BALLET HISPANICO
The Upper West Side company premières "Bésame," Ramon Oller's modern-ballet romance performed to Latin-American popular songs. Repertory works by Ann Reinking, David Roussève, Pedro Ruiz, and Oller complete the program. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 4-7 at 8, Dec. 8 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 9 at 2 and 7:30.)

MIN TANAKA
A few years ago, P.S. 122 drew up a forty-year contract for the butoh dancer and choreographer calling for an annual show until he was ninety years old or dead, whichever came first. "I'm sure I'll be dancing until the last minute anyway," Tanaka says mildly. His 2001 installment features both a late-night jam session with the singer-dancer Meredith Monk and a group piece, "Caprice: Guests from the Dark," in which five dancers enact select etchings from Goya's delicate, depraved series "Los Caprichos." "Our essential question," Tanaka says, "is whether the body's appearance—a caved-in or puffed-up chest, the bulge of the buttocks when standing—shapes society or the other way around." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5933. "Caprice": Dec. 6-9 at 8; Monk-Tanaka duet: Dec. 7-8 at 10:30.)

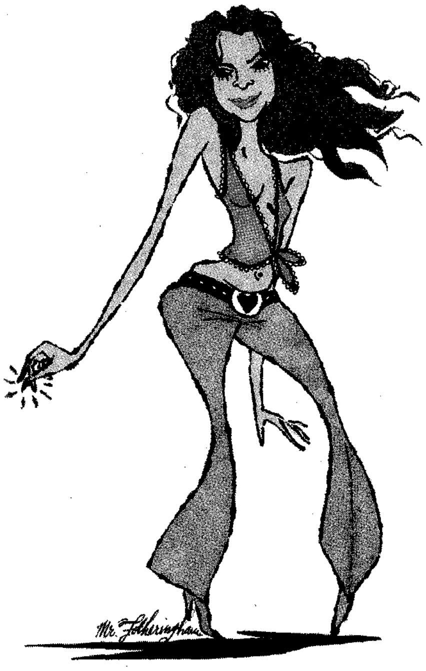
"BOUND EDITION"
In this program of duets and trios by David Parker and the Bang Group, two men meet while wearing Velcro suits and can hardly tear themselves apart; a woman fashions a whip, a noose, and a nun's habit for herself from the seven-foot straps dangling from her pants; and a ménage à trois tangles together and endures a one-minute kiss. The evening abounds in unrestrained dorkiness and tightly choreographed abandon. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 6-9 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"INTERNATIONAL POP OVERTHROW"
Back in 1998, the Los Angeles-based music journalist David Bash drew up a list of rock-and-roll acts he'd love to see in concert and the first annual International Pop Overthrow festival was born. Since then the I.P.O. has grown to become a premier showcase of contemporary power pop and one of the best music festivals on the West Coast. Now Bash has taken the I.P.O. on the road, packing such venues as Arlene's Grocery, Brownies, the Knitting Factory, the Luna Lounge, and Maxwell's with more than eighty bands that meet his definition of pop—they're rich with melody, harmony, and lots of guitar. (The festival runs through Dec. 12. For more information, visit www.internationalpopoverthrow.com.)

BRITNEY SPEARS
Still the queen of the teen-pop realm, despite her recent attempts at proving her newfound maturity, Spears rolls into town for what is guaranteed to be a disquieting spectacle of taut midriffs and loose dance steps. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Dec. 5 at 7:30.)

"THE MANY SHADES OF BLUE"
Many things old, new, borrowed, and certainly blue will be presented as the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band explores the influence of the blues on jazz. The guest soloists include the vocalist Kevin Mahogany and the guitarist Russell Malone; the avant-garde veteran Muhal Richard Abrams presents his new work, "Blues All Around Us," and C.H.J.B. mainstay Slide Hampton premières his "The Blues Ain't Necessarily Bad." The band gives the nod to W. C. Handy, Memphis Slim, and Marvin Gaye with new arrangements of their classic songs. (247-7800. Dec. 6 at 8.)



Nikka Costa, at Irving Plaza.

"JAZZ AT THE PENTHOUSE"
Reminding us all that there was jazz piano before Bill Evans, **Sir Roland Hanna, Terry Waldo,** and **Melvin Chen** tackle the still-vital work of Scott Joplin and other legendary figures of early-jazz piano stylings. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6500. Dec. 6-8 at 8.)

"CONCERT FOR A LANDMINE FREE WORLD"
The country and roots singers **Emmylou Harris, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Bruce Cockburn, Steve Earle,** and **Patty Griffin** headline this benefit concert. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 307-7171. Dec. 7 at 8.)

SIMON SHAHEEN AND QANTATAR
Throughout his career, the forty-six-year-old oud and violin virtuoso Shaheen has been a tireless ambassador for traditional Arabic music, performing in famous concert halls around the world and taking his Near Eastern Music Ensemble everywhere from elementary schools to Ivy League universities. Six years ago, he broadened his horizons even further, forming the band Qantatar, which incorporates American jazz and Western folk and classical music. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 307-7171. Dec. 8 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Dec. 6-7: **B. B. King** enjoys the fruits of his fame at his posh Times Square home. Dec. 8: The **Jeff Healey Band.** The Canadian Healey is a blind blues guitarist who used to be a blind blues phenom; back in 1988, he had a hit with his interpretation of the John Hiatt song "Angel Eyes."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 5: The **Asylum Street Spankers,** a collective of acoustic-blues-loving musicians out of Austin, Texas, have equal measures of disdain for contemporary music and for certain contemporary domestic policies. The war on drugs, for example, is a favorite target. On last year's album, "Spanker Madness," such songs as "Wake and Bake," "Blade of Grass," and "Amsterdam" mixed oldtime song structure with amusing lyrics.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 7-8: The groovy Venezuelan dance band **Los Amigos Invisibles.**

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Dec. 7: Boasting the original, frantic percussive wing of New York's own Skeleton Key and the guitarist from Ohio's herky-jerky Brainiac, the madmen in **Enon** bridge the gap between clever indie rock and experimental noise. Their quirky, hard-edged pop is rife with a dizzying arsenal of squeaks, buzzes, electronic hisses, and other found sounds. With the guitar-driven clamor of **Love as Laughter.**

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 4-5: The flagship band of a new movement of emotive British rock, **Coldplay** distinguishes itself with stark, earnest songs built around the soaring vocals of Chris Martin. Dec. 7-8: Singer-songwriter **Martin Sexton.** Dec. 9: **Nikka Costa** is no babe in the woods. The twenty-seven-year-old vocalist with the Page Six good looks and a voice powerful enough to stop the presses may be on tour supporting her U.S. début album, "Everybody Got Their Something," but Costa, the daughter of the famed producer Don Costa, long ago went multi-platinum in Europe and in her adopted homeland, Australia. It's no surprise, given that Costa sings her intoxicating mix of funk and rock and roll as if she's the love child of Janis Joplin and Prince.

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—Dec. 6: The seventy-year-old folk and blues legend **Odetta,** who in her long career has been an inspiration to everyone from Bob Dylan to Maya Angelou.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Dec. 6: **El Vez,** the "Mexican Elvis," hosts his Christmas party. Señor Vez is far more than your run-of-the-mill Elvis impersonator: he claims to be the illegitimate man-child of the King and Charo. He sings in Spanish and wears a layered outfit that he slowly unpeels and tosses into the audience. *Feliz Navidad*, indeed.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 8-9: **El Vez** (see Maxwell's). Dec. 10: The **Candy Butchers,** the local Beatle-esque act led by the singer-songwriter Mike Viola, stop by with songs from their forthcoming album, "Play with Your Head."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through Dec. 10: What better jazz singer to present a holiday show than the ever-perky vocalist **Jane Monheit,** whose youthful glow seems to exude glad tidings all through the year?

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Dec. 5-8: **Joe Lovano,** one of the most consistently fascinating and ambitious modernist saxophonists, can do many things with utmost style, but approximating the sheer girth of John Coltrane's magisterial tone is not among them. No matter: his can-do spirit, unembarrassed love of his subject, and the support of a charged rhythm section will carry the day. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—His fusion years now faded like a particularly unpleasant dream, **Chick Corea** can proudly resume his place alongside McCoy Tyner and Herbie Hancock in the triumvirate of great living modern piano masters. With his hands in so many projects, this three-week mini-retrospective, in honor of his sixtieth birthday, starts with a few of his more celebrated ventures: duets with super-vocalist **Bobby McFerrin** on Dec. 4-5; the wondrous "Now He Sings, Now He Sobs" trio, with the bassist **Miroslav Vitous** and the drummer **Roy Haynes,** on Dec. 6-7; and an all-star Bud Powell tribute with Haynes, the saxophonist **Joshua Redman,** the trumpeter **Terence Blanchard,** and the bassist **Christian McBride** on Dec. 8-10.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Through Dec. 22: Back on his home turf, the pianist **Michael Feinstein** presents a program of holiday songs. He's also introducing a new singer, **Maude Maggart.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 9: The celebrated pianist **Geri Allen** may be the most accomplished player of her generation; perhaps that contributed to her selection as the first-ever pianist in Ornette Coleman's band. Allen cuts a brazen swath through nearly a century of jazz-piano idioms, all buffed to a modernist sheen. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Quintet of Remembrance,"** a handsome and pretentious video by Bill Viola, is the first work in its medium to enter the Met's collection. It is a silent sixteen-minute projection in slow motion of a one-minute performance by five people. Standing together, they enact tragic emotions, in reaction to an unidentified, evidently harrowing offscreen event. Viola says that he was in-

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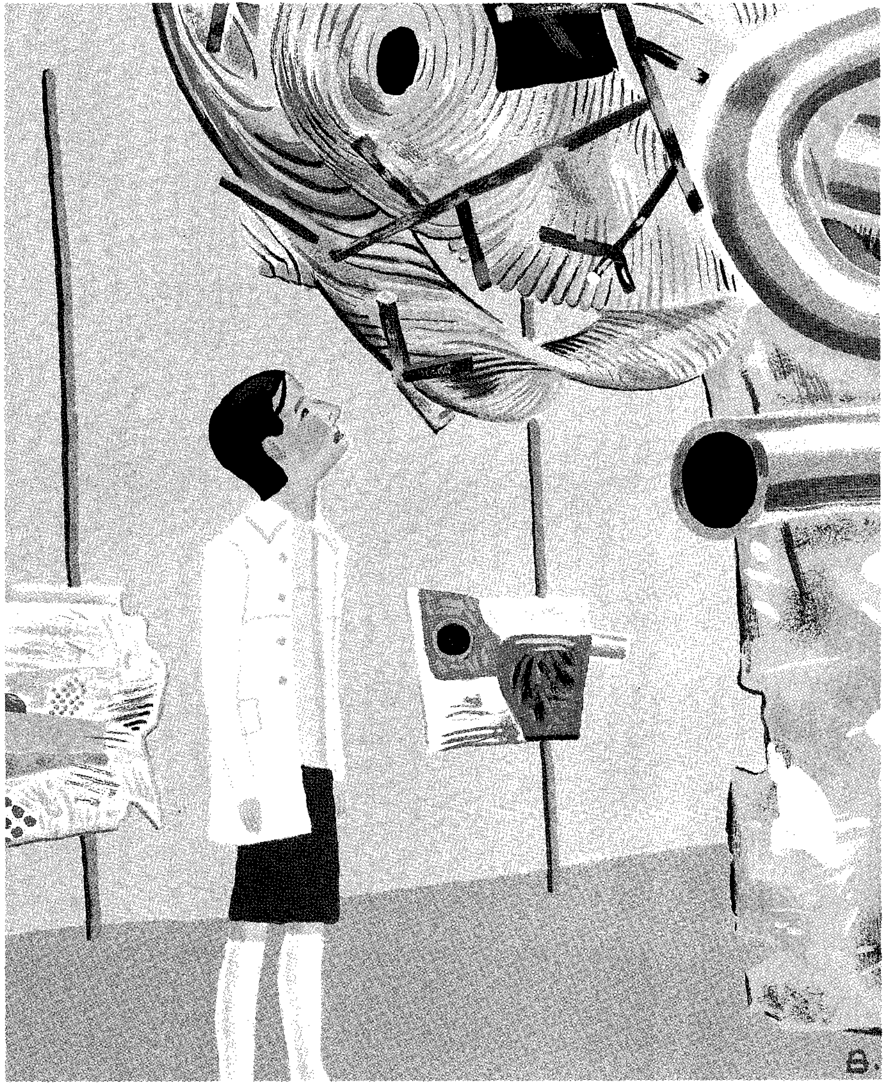
spired by emotive stylings in Renaissance paintings. Insufficiently awed viewers may be hard put not to giggle at the actors' solemn mugging, which suggests a high-rent answer to the male-model movie comedy "Zoolander." The woman on the left appears to be attempting to channel Maria Falconetti (who was a lot better) from Carl Dreyer's "The Passion of Joan of Arc." Through May 5. ♦ **"Paul Signac 1863-1935: Master Neo-Impressionist."** Through Dec. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An Alberto Giacometti retrospective reacquaints us with the Swiss sculptor's iconic skinny statues while emphasizing his paintings and his less esteemed Surrealist objects of the nineteen-thirties. Revision is not achieved. Except for "The Palace at 4 A.M." and "Woman with Her Throat Cut"—two 1932 marvels that bespeak bolt-from-the-blue inspiration like that of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"—the objects show Giacometti in a weakly pandering mode. The paintings, mostly portraits from the nineteen-fifties, expend obsessive energy to visually skimpy ends. But the great statues are more engaging than ever. These tragicomic presences don't so much stand in the world as stand up to it, ravaged by the very space around them but maintaining vestigial subjectivity in the thrust of a chin, the tilt of a hip, and the set of a shoulder—calling to the heart. Through Jan. 8. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)



FRANKLY AWFUL *Shriekingly ugly congeries of tortured aluminum shown with vast paintings on canvas, at Kasmin. How did the cool dude of abstract painting in the nineteen-sixties come to this? According to Frank Stella, it is the living end of Western art history. Phooey. The toneless visual cacophony could wake the dead and make them want to be dead again.—Peter Schjeldahl*

JULIETTE BORDA

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—For **"Brazil: Body & Soul"** the Thomas Krens team has gone to new extremes, utterly transforming the museum and leaving one awed by the mega-exhibition's scope, design, audacity, and cost. The rotunda is now a Stygian theatre, with a massive baroque altarpiece in its center. From there, viewers ascend past ranks of polychromed Madonnas, carved lions, ex-votos, and tribal videos and arrive, finally, at a celestial ring of white rooms, where the baroque (which lasted nearly three centuries in Brazil) abruptly gives way to modernism. Through Jan. 27. ♦ **"Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People"** shows Rockwell's genius as a visual storyteller, a quality that proves almost as immune to critical appreciation as to snobbish animus. His three hundred and twenty-two *Saturday Evening Post* covers—arrayed here with some of their deftly painted originals—imagine an America whose chief quality is winsome tolerance. Even in wartime, his congenital, at times daunting, optimism never faltered. Through March 3. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Each one of Burt Barr's four silent, black-and-white projections is a one-liner about the mechanics of filmmaking. In "Dolly Shot, Twice," the camera moves back and forth—one long shot in each direction—across a Cadillac with a gorgeous blonde shot dead behind the wheel, for a "Big Sleep"-on-quaaludes effect. In "Slow Dissolve," an ice cube melts on a glass plate with the shot ending in (you guessed it) a slow dissolve. The punch line is heavy-handed, and the extreme slowness, a familiar strategy that Barr does little to enliven, annoys more than it rewards. Through Jan. 27. ♦ **"Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence."** Through Feb. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum."** Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

"EVERYBODY NOW"
An agoraphile's delight, this lively theme show gathers images of crowds: in sports stadiums and phone books, at beaches and political rallies (including, of course, the Million Man March). As you might expect, photography dominates, especially in mobbed, amazing shots by the panoramists of the moment, Andreas Gursky and Massimo Vitale. For painters, a crowd is a more exhausting proposition, but James Sheehan solves the problem by restricting himself to a decal-sized panel. The result, a teensy image of an enormous event, seems incongruously intimate. Through Dec. 8. (Leubsdorf Gallery, Hunter College, Lexington Ave. at 68th St. 772-4991.)

Short List

ROY LICHTENSTEIN
Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Jan. 12.

GABRIEL OROZCO
Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Through Dec. 29.

MARK ROTHKO
Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Jan. 5.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

KAI ALTHOFF
There's a paradoxically epic sweep to this show of small paintings, drawings, and photographs that careen from style to style at a disarming rate. Althoff seems to be asking "How German am I?" as he cannibalizes his art-historical heritage from the moody palette and lurking menace of Emil Nolde and Die Brücke to the alchemy, resin, and range of Sigmar Polke. The figurative paintings (actually watercolors mounted on canvas and worked over with varnish and lacquer) are the most compelling, rendered with a delicacy that belies their often brutal subject matter. Through Dec. 22. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 367-9663.)

TONY FEHER
The leading trash minimalist proves his mettle again with piquant arrays of everyday detritus. Feher has stacked three hundred and fifty red plastic soda cases in a near-cube, about six and a half feet per dimension; merely by roughening patches of their exposed sides, he sells them to a viewer's imagination as bricks. The pile thus evokes something massive and stern, à la Richard Serra, while remaining pure junk. The flimsy produce crates, bits of lumber, and plastic bottles in a dispersed floor piece manage to evoke the refined glamour of a Bauhaus utopia. Feher reminds you of the coach who is alone in see-

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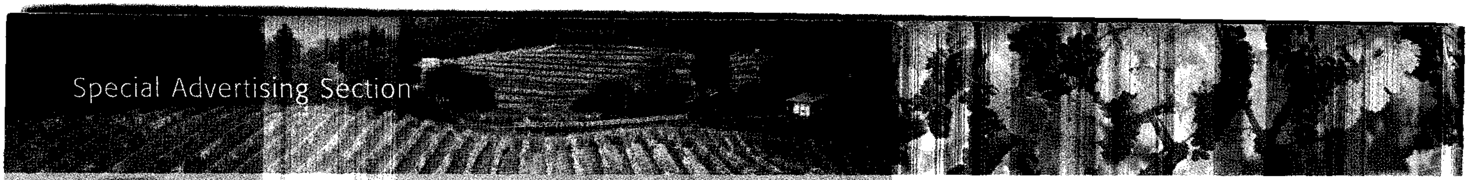
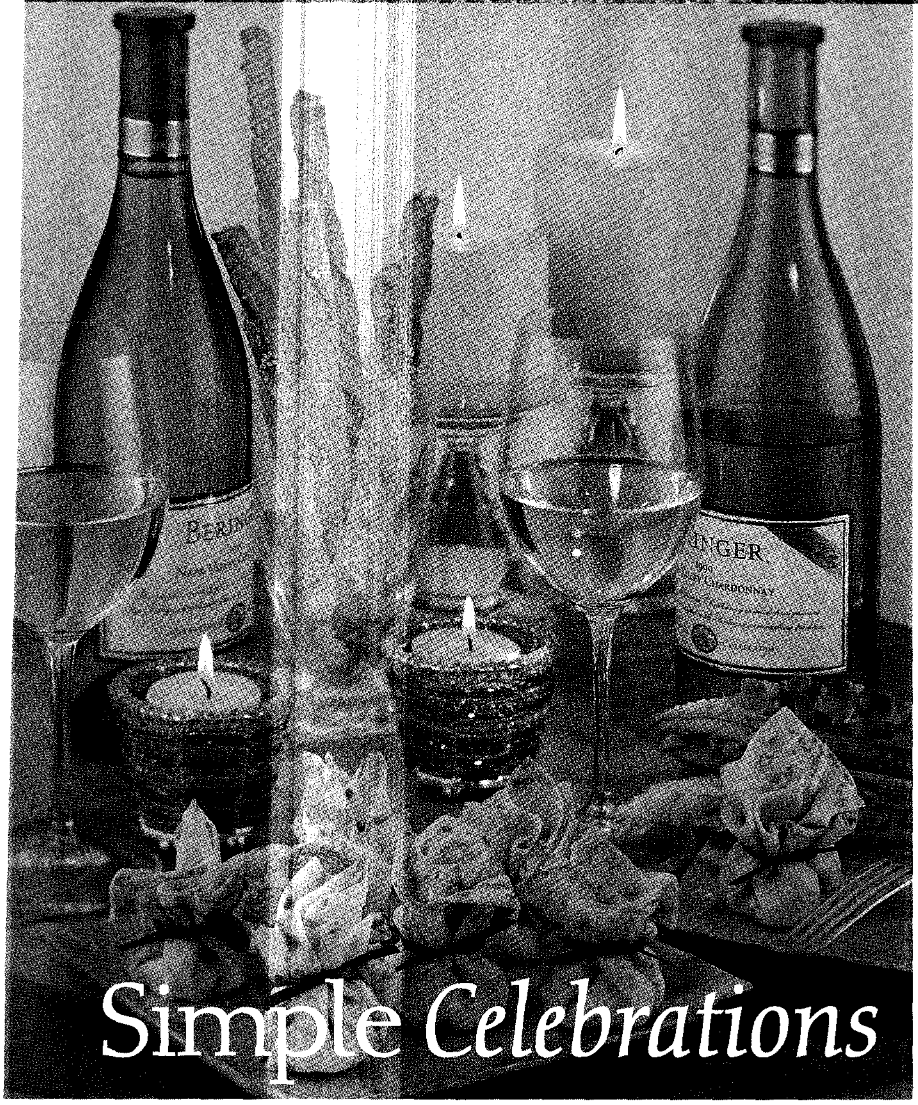




Simple Celebrations

Certain ingredients add up to sure-fire success when it comes to holiday get-togethers. It's almost impossible to go wrong when combining good friends, great company, and top-notch wines—a perfect recipe for entertaining in style.

The first step, creating the guest list, should be simple. Just pick a group of people you enjoy spending time with; that way, even if they're only meeting for the first time, everyone is almost guaranteed to get along.

When it comes to food for informal yet festive parties, keep it simple but elegant. Hors d'oeuvres that are easy to prepare are always best for the host, but a little extra preparation lets your guests know that they are worthy of delicious and special fare.

And what better way to complete the formula for flawless entertaining than by selecting the perfect wine? Chardonnay is always a good choice, with its winning combination of character and versatility. Like your ideal party guest, Chardonnay can adapt to almost anything with ease—and it pairs effortlessly with a wide variety of foods.

In a sea of Chardonnays from around the world, it is a pleasure to turn to a brand that provides both the guarantee of exceptional quality and a name you and your guests already know and love: Beringer.

Beringer's 1999 Napa Valley Chardonnay is aged for nine months in French oak barrels. An exceptionally long, cool growing season followed by late-summer Napa Valley sun results in an exceptionally rich and full-bodied wine. The wine is endowed with butterscotch, sweet vanilla, and toasty, woodsy aromas; its creamy mouthfeel is accompanied by notes of honey, nutmeg, and citrus.

Not only is Beringer Napa Valley Chardonnay a great choice for hosts, it makes a wonderful gift. So when choosing the best wines for the best of friends and family, turn to Beringer, a key ingredient for holiday entertaining.

Scallop and Exotic Mushroom

Beggars' Purses

These beautiful little packages can be served as individual hors d'oeuvres. They would also make a wonderful first course, three to a plate.

Makes about 24 purses

24 crepes, homemade or bought
1 large bunch chives
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
24 small sea scallops (about 1 pound), trimmed, rinsed, and patted dry
⅓ cup finely chopped shallots
½ pound exotic mushrooms (such as chanterelles, porcini, oyster, shiitake, etc.), trimmed, washed, patted dry, and chopped medium fine
¼ cup dry white wine
½ cup heavy cream
2 teaspoons truffle oil

Trim the crepes into 5-inch rounds. Snip 2 tablespoons of chives and set aside. Blanch the remaining chives in a small pot of boiling water for 15 seconds and immediately plunge into ice water. Drain and pat dry.

In a large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the butter and 1 tablespoon of the oil over high heat until hot. Add the scallops seasoned with salt and pepper to taste, and cook until nicely seared on both sides and almost cooked through, about 3 minutes total. Transfer the scallops from the pan with a slotted spoon to a plate and reserve. Add the remaining tablespoon of butter and the shallots to the pan and cook over moderately low heat for 5 minutes or until softened. Add the mushrooms and cook for 3 to 5 minutes or until the liquid the mushrooms give off is evaporated. Add the wine and simmer until the liquid is reduced to 1 tablespoon. Add the cream and simmer until thickened and reduced by half. Add the scallops with their juices, and salt and pepper to taste. Remove the mixture from the heat and stir in the truffle oil and the 2 tablespoons of chopped chives.

Spoon one scallop onto the center of each crepe. Spoon some of the mushroom mixture over the scallop and tie the crepe into a little bundles or "purses" using a blanched chive. Repeat the procedure with the remaining crepes, scallops and chives. Keep the prepared purses warm in a low oven while you prepare the remaining purses.

Sara Moulton
Gourmet Executive Chef and Host of *Cooking Live!*

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Museum Pieces

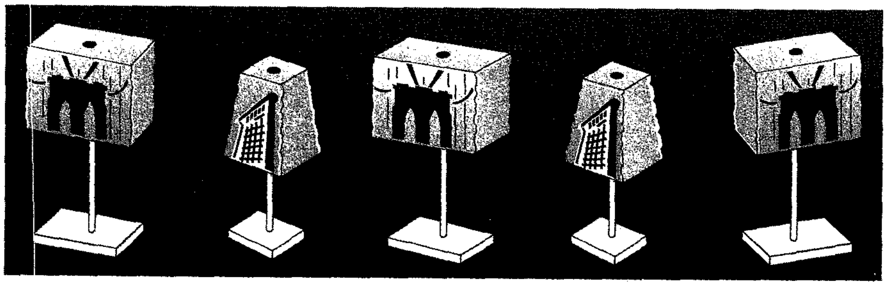
Though the silk scarf at the **LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM SHOP** (90 Orchard St.; 431-0233) may look like an ordinary holiday gift, it has a history an Hermès muffler would envy: floral wallpaper discovered in Apartment 9 on the third floor of 97 Orchard Street, the site of the museum, was the inspiration for the fabric's pattern ($45). According to curators, the paper was number fifteen of seventeen layers of wall coverings and probably dates from the nineteen-twenties. In any case, its long-lost designer seems to have been a William Morris fan—the print offers crimson blossoms on an ecru background, and those interested in the pattern's history can compare it with a facsimile of the original paper, which is displayed in the showcase right next to the merchandise. Walls aren't the store's only enthusiasm: the pressed-metal ceilings found in many nineteenth-century walkups form the basis of a pair of sterling earrings that incorporate, on small silver squares, Beaux Arts fleurets ($75). And a diorama of a privy and a clothesline has been executed with such delicacy by Pamela Keech, a curator and visual artist—the clothesline holds a minuscule patterned rug and a lace tablecloth—that it deserves a place under the tree ($80).

In concert with a current retrospective of works by Al Hirschfeld, the shop at the **MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK** (1220 Fifth Ave.; 534-1672) sells a set of books by the artist, including "Hirschfeld's New York," which offers, among other depictions of cosmopolitan revelry, a drawing entitled "The Crowd at Gogi's Larue." Framed panoramic photographs of familiar streetscapes ($150) include an image of a sleepy Union Square in 1911. The museum is also famous for its permanent collection of antique fire-fighting equipment, and there's everything from an eighteenth-century leather helmet to an 1832 Gooseneck fire engine to a two-hundred-year-old wood water pipe in the basement galleries. If a young person on your holiday gift list has lately developed an interest in the subject, a die-cast fire engine that does double duty as a pencil sharpener could serve as a stocking stuffer ($2.25).

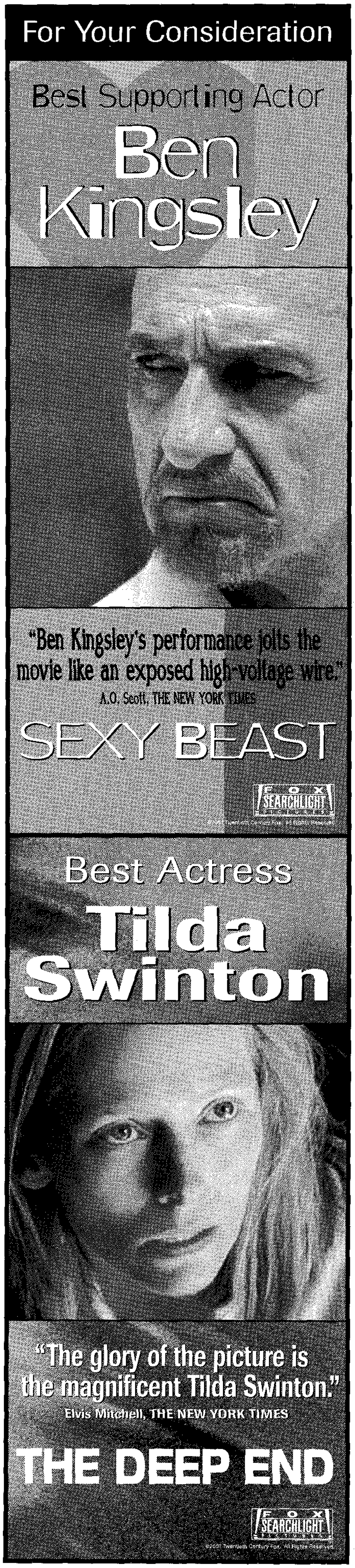
When asked recently what token jewelry was made of—brass? gold?—the clerk at the **NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM** shop in Grand Central Terminal rolled her eyes. "They're tokens," she said. "Real tokens." The tokens have been deployed as key chains and money clips, turned into dress sets, and even mounted *à trois* like those drop earrings so fashionable in diamonds these days ($19.95). Though tokens are king here, the MetroCard is not entirely overlooked: a miniature version turns up as a rectangular watch face ($40).

At the **NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY** (2 W. 77th St.; 873-3400), black-and-white photographs of landmarks such as the Flatiron Building and the Brooklyn Bridge enhance luminous photovellum lampshades. Grand Central's distinctive chandeliers and famous clock are transformed into tree ornaments; a third bauble looks like a shiny yellow Checker cab covered with gold glitter ($24). A spectacular limited-edition chess set ($200) has playing pieces that manage to evoke a number of aspects of New York: the knights are mounted police; the pawns are taxis, the Chrysler Building has been transformed into a bishop; Madame Liberty and the Empire State Building are the royal couple; and the Twin Towers stand sentry as proud and valiant rooks.

—*Lynn Yaeger*



STEPHEN SAVAGE



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Best Supporting Actor

Ben Kingsley

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A.O. Scott, THE NEW YORK TIMES

SEXY BEAST

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Best Actress

Tilda Swinton

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Elvis Mitchell, THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE DEEP END

FOX SEARCHLIGHT

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ing the makings of a championship team in a squad of demoralized losers. The losers come through for him every time. Through Dec. 22. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.)

PETER KRASHES
In previous shows, there seemed to be something sexual going on in Krashes's highly distorted, luminously wobbly images. Here, their subject is suddenly clearer. What once seemed like porn turns out to be Krashes himself exercising in his living room, with his Nordic Track, TV set, and personal trainer. Physical therapy has a special urgency for Krashes (he has a rare form of rheumatoid arthritis), but the ordinariness of the activity focusses our attention elsewhere—on the pictures' odd, subtle painterliness and unexpected modesty. Through Dec. 22. (Eller, 526 W. 25th St. 206-6411.)

PATRICK STRZELEC
For this double show, Strzelec has come up with an ingenious, perfectly simple idea. His new sculptures are networks of brightly colored rubber tubing draped over steel armatures. The soft and rigid elements read independently—each is sculpture in its own right—but their combined effect is elegantly gangly and comic. One thinks of capillaries hung over bones, vines over branches, a drunk supported by a sober friend. At Grimm, Strzelec is also showing a strange spudlike form, a sort of tuberous aorta, whose lopped rubber innards seem poised to sprout in new directions. Through Jan. 12. (Grimm, 505 W. 28th St., 564-7662; and Snyder, 601 W. 29th St., 871-1077.)

Short List

JOHN CURRIN
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.
Through Dec. 15.

WILLEM DE KOONING
Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.
Through Dec. 22.

RICHARD SERRA
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 15.

FRANK STELLA
Kasmin, 289-291 Tenth Ave. 563-4474.
Through Dec. 22.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

"PASTORAL TO POSTINDUSTRIAL"
Napoleon dismissed Britain as a nation of shopkeepers; this show casts its artists as a nation of landscape painters. Curators at Manchester's Whitworth Art Gallery help convict their countrymen on the charge with a selection ranging from the stiffly formal "Eaton College Chapel" (ca. 1770) to Damian Hirst's untitled selection of crystals purchased on King's Road, laid out on pink paper and photographed as if for a geology textbook (1992). None of the marquee works—six Turner scenes, two elegant Whistler etchings of the Thames, a messy Ruskin watercolor, a print from Rachel Whiteread, and photographs from Andy Goldsworthy—are crucial to an understanding of their artists' careers, but each serves well in the show's satisfyingly selective time line. Through Jan. 26. (Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 998-6780.)

Short List

ANDREA ZITTEL
Inglett, 100 Wooster St. 343-0573.
Through Dec. 15.

"WIDELY UNKNOWN"
Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 343-7300.
Through Dec. 22.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Dec. 5 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Jewelry, including designs made for the house of Mikimoto by Carolina Herrera and Oscar de la Renta. ♦ Dec. 6 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: A sale of "arcade" jewelry, items offered in a more moderate price range. ♦ Dec. 7 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: "Egyptian, Classical, and Western Asiatic Antiquities." A Greek marble head of Aphrodite, from the late fourth century B.C. (expected to sell for approximately half a million dollars), is a highlight of the sale. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Vintage prints of Imogen Cunningham's photographs of her children, at Stevenson.

CHRISTIE'S
Dec. 5 at 10 A.M.: Ancient jewelry of Greek, Roman, Judaic, and Asian origin, including a Greek gold strap necklace, circa 300 B.C., estimated to sell for approximately a hundred thousand dollars. ♦ Dec. 5 at 2 and Dec. 6 at 10 A.M. and 2: Antiquities. A very large gabbro portrait head of the pharaoh Amenhotep III, from the late fourteenth century B.C., is the highlight of the sale. ♦ Dec. 7 at 10 A.M.: "Important Twentieth Century Decorative Arts," focussing on design from the Art Nouveau and modernist movements. ♦ Dec. 7 at 2: Works from the Tiffany studios. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

PHILLIPS
Dec. 5 at 2: "Highly Important French and Continental Furniture," a sale capped by the offer of a Louis XIV ormolu-mounted Boulle marquetry armoire (estimated to bring at least five million dollars). (3 W. 57th St. 570-4830.)

SWANN
Dec. 6 at 10:30 A.M.: "Early Printed Books," including a third illustrated edition of Dante's "La Commedia" (from 1491), English literature, and a selection of Bibles. ♦ Dec. 7 at 10:30 A.M. and 2:30: Photographs and photographic literature. A copy of Carl Sandburg's "Steichen the Photographer" (signed by both men), one of a thousand issued, is a highlight of the sale, which also features works by Man Ray, Imogen Cunningham, and Yousuf Karsh. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

WYNN BULLOCK (1902-1975)
"Realities and Metaphors" is New York's first Bullock show since a 1976 retrospective at the Met. It offers plenty of his signature nudes in landscapes, including "Child in Forest" (1951), which appears in the opening pages of Steichen's "The Family of Man," and a large collection of lesser-known work made at the beginning and end of his career. Aaron Siskind-like abstract studies of nature are not entirely unexpected, but several solarized portraits from the forties, reminiscent of Man Ray's, seem refreshingly out of character. Through Jan. 5. (Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM (1883-1976)
This show's vintage prints are from the collection of Rondal Partridge, who appears in them—in a bob and a little dress, in a collared shirt and a cardigan, and sometimes in nothing at all. Rondal, his identical twin, Padraic, and their brother Gryffyd were their mother's favorite subjects. The light reflected in their round faces and flying hair is only slightly softer

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than that which falls on her more formal arrangements of lilies and magnolias, a selection of which Partridge has reprinted in platinum. Through Jan. 5. (Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St. 352-0070.)

COLLIER SCHORR
Schorr has photographed members of high-school wrestling teams as well as soldiers in the Israeli and Swedish armies. Now she goes further, dressing young German models in uniforms from the Second World War. The boys, posed in a verdant landscape, are so touchingly formal in their body language that even those who model nude seem clothed in seriousness. Tender and erotic, the images teeter dangerously on the edge of at least two taboos, child sexuality and Nazi imagery. Through Dec. 21. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—**"Helmut Newton: Work,"** a retrospective; **"The Construction of the Paris Opera: Photographs of Delmaet and Durandelle"**; and **"'Greed' and Other Recent Acquisitions"** are on show through Dec. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

KENRO IZU
Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444.
Through Dec. 15.

JOEL MEYEROWITZ
Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway, 625-3434.
Through Dec. 15.

"HERE IS NEW YORK"
Here Is New York, 116 Prince St. 334-6684.
Through Dec. 24.

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OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The vibrant, joyous production of **"Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"** enters its final week, with Karita Mattila, Jill Grove, Ben Heppner, Matthew Polenzani, James Morris, Thomas Allen, and René Pape; James Levine conducts, giving Wagner's layered counterpoint some Mozartean lift. (Dec. 5 at 6 and Dec. 8 at noon.) ♦ The latest outing of the Met's 1983 production of **"Arabella,"** Strauss and Hofmannsthal's lighthearted romantic fantasy of nineteenth-century Vienna, is unevenly sung and a bit lacking in style, but the lyrical vocal bloom of Renée Fleming's soprano gives it a strong center. Christoph Eschenbach's conducting is not big on detail, but he draws out lots of rosy, soft-edged sound from the orchestra. Also with Sandra Moon, Raymond Very, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, and Harry Dworchak. (Dec. 6 at 8.) ♦ With Barbara Bonney (a very appealing Zdenka) replacing Moon and Eric Halfvarson replacing Dworchak. (Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ Catherine Malfitano joins the cast of **"Madama Butterfly"** in the title role, along with Maria Zifchak, Walter Fraccaro, and Kim Josephson; Marco Armiliato. (Dec. 7 and Dec. 10 at 8.) ♦ **"La Traviata,"** with June Anderson, Frank Lopardo, and John Avey; Maurizio Benini. (Dec. 8 at 8:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE
A double bill of Menotti's **"Amelia Goes to the Ball"** and Ward's **"Roman Fever,"** conducted by David Gilbert. (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 4428. Dec. 5 and Dec. 7 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 2:30.)

DICAPO OPERA
Louis Salemno conducts a cast of promising young singers in a production of Massenet's **"Werther."** (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 288-9438. Dec. 7-8 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 4. Through Dec. 16.)

AMATO OPERA
The chamber company presents **"The Magic Flute,"** in English, conducted and directed by Anthony Amato. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Dec. 8 at 7:30 and Dec. 9 at 2:30. Through Jan. 6.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Like many great veteran artists, the cellist Lynn Harrell may have lost some technical sparkle in recent years, but his interpretive insights have only deepened. Schumann's poignant Cello Concerto is a specialty of his; Iván Fischer conducts it, along with Mahler's Symphony No. 5. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 6-8 at 8 and Dec. 11 at 7:30.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
"A World Apart," the conductor Leon Botstein's latest program, explores music by several émigré composers who left the European continent before the Second World War, including Korngold's Cello Concerto (from the soundtrack for the Bette Davis film "Deception"; Jan Vogler is the soloist here) and the Symphony No. 3 by Egon Wellesz, a disciple of Schoenberg. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 5 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AT CARNEGIE HALL
Dec. 5 at 8: Orpheus presents a concert of instrumental works by Telemann and Corelli along with a selection of folk songs and Handel arias sung by the countertenor Andreas Scholl. ♦ Dec. 9 at 2: The New York Youth Symphony accompanies Elmar Oliveira in the Brahms Violin Concerto, on a program that also includes Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and the première of "Dance," by the young composer Emily Lenore Doolittle. Mischa Santora conducts. (247-7800.)

LES ARTS FLORISSANTS
William Christie brings his super-refined Paris-based ensemble back to New York, directing a concert of sacred music by Charpentier (including the "Christmas Mass" and the "Christmas Oratorio"). (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 721-6500. Dec. 7 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 4.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS
The renowned British choir performs a concert of music by Obrecht, Victoria, Tallis (the Mass "Puer natus est nobis"), and others; all proceeds will be given to the Robin Hood Relief Fund for the victims of the World Trade Center tragedy. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 595-4036. Dec. 10 at 8.)

RECITALS

FRIENDS & ENEMIES OF NEW MUSIC
A group of prominent composer-pianists (including David Del Tredici, Robert Beaser, and Tom Cipullo) accompany their own songs, collaborating with the sopranos Hila Plitmann and Karen Holvik and the baritone Chris Pedro Trakas. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Dec. 5 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MUSIC AT MERKIN CONCERT HALL
Dec. 5 at 8: The Festival Chamber Music Society performs music by Mendelssohn, Françaix (the Clarinet Quintet, featuring Charles Neidich), and Arthur Foote. ♦ Dec. 6 at 8: Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time" and Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" (with the soprano Janice Felty), presented by the New York Philomusica. ♦ Dec. 10 at 8: Elliott Carter's music has long been a special focus of Speculum Musicae, one of the world's leading contemporary-music groups. For this program, the composer has selected several of his own works (including the Quartet for Oboe and Strings, which enjoys its American première) along with two pieces by his close friend Goffredo Petrassi. ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: The Washington Square Contemporary Music Society presents music by Messiaen, Babbitt, the Scottish composer James Dillon, and others, on a program featuring the soprano Judith Bettina. (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330.)

BARGEMUSIC
Two programs coördinated by the violist Toby Hoffman. Dec. 6 and Dec. 8 at 7:30: String quartets by Haydn and Beethoven (the "Harp") bookend Bach's Suite No. 3 in C Major for Solo Cello (with Colin Carr). ♦ Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 9 at 4: The ensemble (which also includes the violinists Mark Kaplan and Mark Peskanov) returns for another program of Bach, Beethoven, and Haydn (the Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

THEO BLECKMANN
The avant-garde cabaret singer, with his ensemble, presents a program of songs inspired by the art of origami. (Roulette, 228 West Broadway. 219-8242. Dec. 6 at 8:30.)

LEOPOLD STRING TRIO
The young British ensemble presents music by Dohnányi, Beethoven, Judith Weir (the New York première of "The Bagpiper's String Trio"), and Mozart (the Piano Quartet in G Minor, with Paul Lewis). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 7 at 8.)

ROMEIKO ENSEMBLE
Byzantine chant and Turkish Sufi music, presented by an ensemble of Greek, Turkish, and American musicians. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. 545-7536. Dec. 8 at 8.)

PAUL GROVES
Groves, one of the Met's favorite Mozart tenors, presents a recital of songs by Beethoven, Duparc, Ives, Rorem, and Beach, along with Vaughan Williams's Housman cycle "On Wenlock Edge" (with the St. Lawrence String Quartet). The pianist is Malcolm Martineau. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 9 at 2.)

BROOKLYN FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC
Kevin Beavers's "Wandlebury Ring"—the first commissioned work in this Fort Greene group's thirteen-year history—is premièred by the Cassatt String Quartet and the mezzo-soprano Stephanie Houtzeel, on a program that also includes quartets by Haydn (the "Emperor") and Brahms. (Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Lafayette Ave. at S. Oxford St. 718-855-3053. Dec. 9 at 3.)

MUSIC AT THE KOSCIUSZKO FOUNDATION
Two recitals in the foundation's elegant drawing-room space. Dec. 9 at 3: In the latest presentation of the Marilyn Horne Foundation, the baritone Nicolai Janitzky and the pianist Ines Irawati perform songs and arias by Mozart, Glinka, Barber (the melancholy Three Songs, Op. 45), Lully, and others. ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: Polish songs by Paderewski and Szymanowski are the focus of the bass-baritone Jan Opalach's recital, presented with the pianist Gait Sirguey. (15 E. 65th St. 734-2130.)

MIKA YOSHIDA
The marimba player presents a program of new music, including the New York première of Steve Reich's "Tokyo/Vermont Counterpoint." (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 11 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Dec. 7 at 7: By Jennifer Egan, the author of the novel "Look at Me," and by faculty members of the Writers Studio, from their work. (Village Community School, 272 W. 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Dec. 9 at 7: By Todd Pruzan, Sean Wilsey, John Hodgman, and Arthur Bradford, from their contributions to the literary journal *McSweeney's*. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 10 at 8: The poets John Hollander, Marilyn Hacker, Richard Howard, J. D. McClatchy, and Rosanna Warren offer an evening of sonnets. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500.)

TALKS
Dec. 6 at 7:30: The photographer Leslie Fratkin talks about the making of her latest book, "Sarajevo Self-Portrait: The View from Inside." (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 9 at 3: Art Spiegelman presents an illustrated discussion of his latest book, "Strange Stories for Strange Kids." (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166.) ♦ Dec. 11 at 7:30: The Libertarian Book Club's Anarchist Forum presents Peter Lamborn Wilson, the author of "Escape from the Nineteenth Century," who will consider the history and legacy of the Luddites. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St., 10th floor. For more information, call 979-8353.) ♦ Dec. 11 at 7:30: The vocalist Meredith Monk joins the sculptor Mary Lucier, the dancer and choreographer Eiko Otake, the playwright John Jesurun, and other performing artists for a discussion titled "Myth and the Contemporary." (Location One, 26 Greene St. For more information, call 334-3347.)

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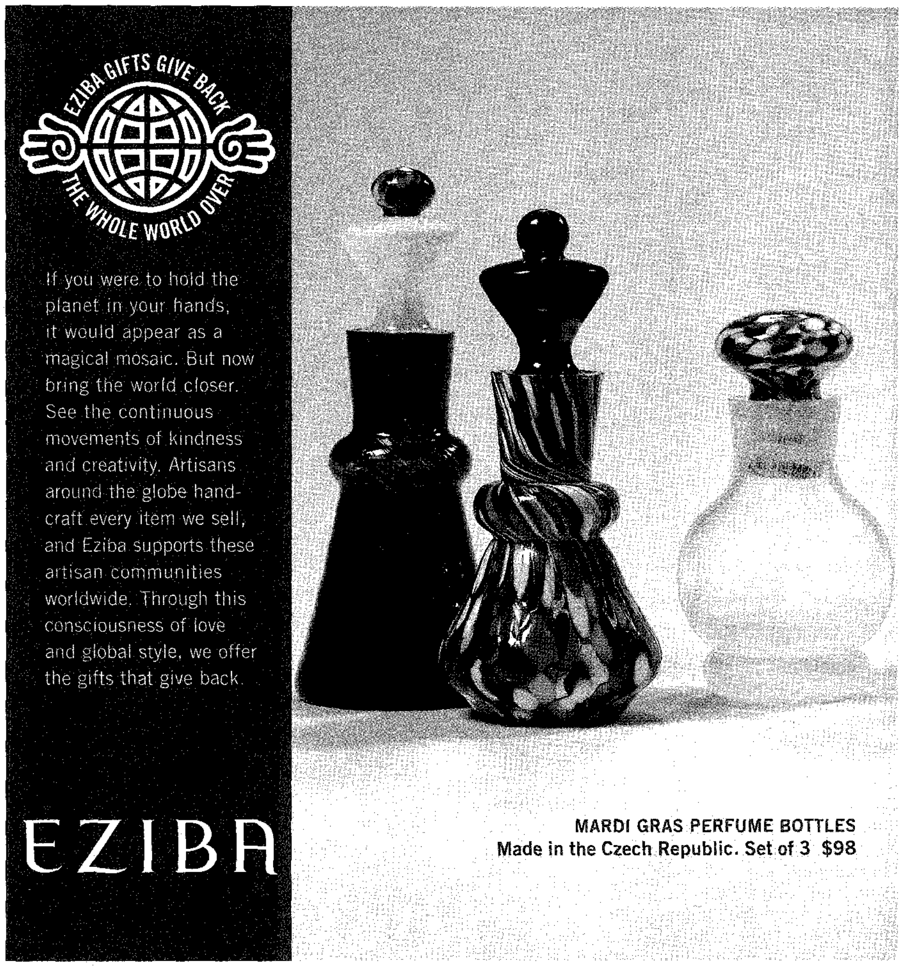

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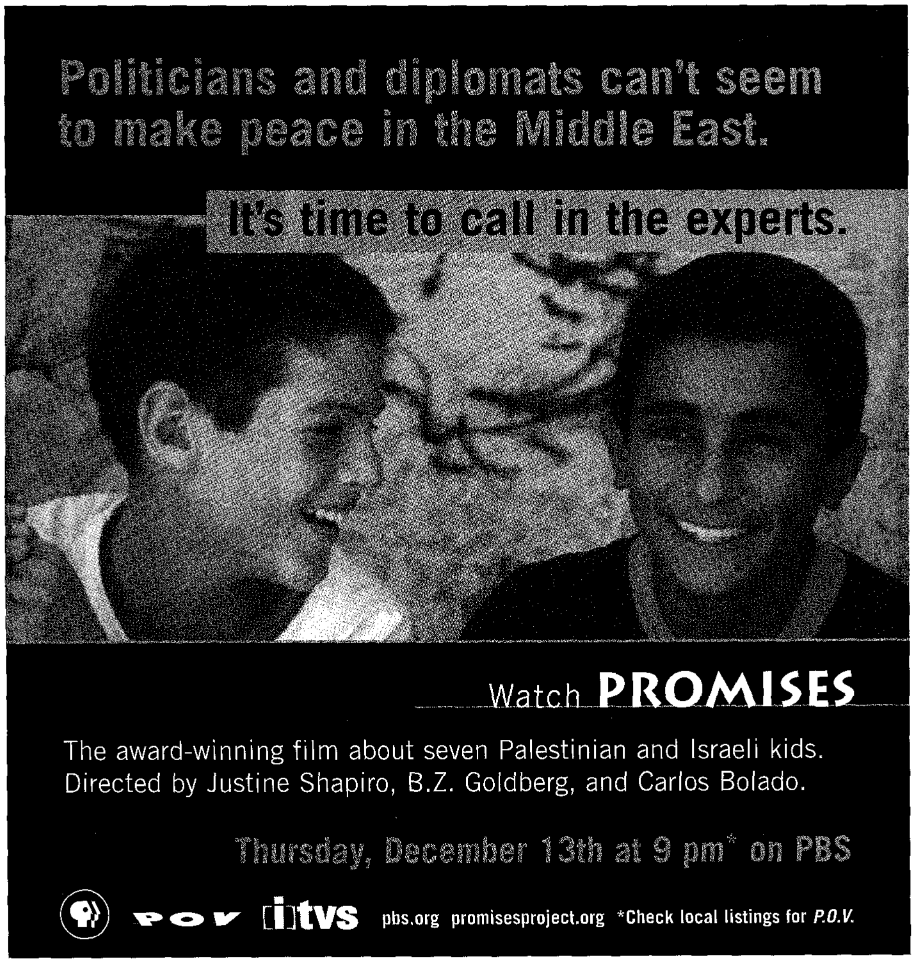

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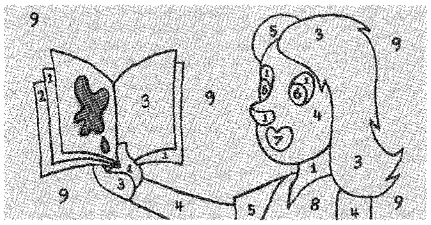
BOOK CURRENTS

Think Visual

In Chip Kidd's recent comic novel, "The Cheese Monkeys," a wide-eyed undergrad of the fifties gets his middlebrow aesthetic assumptions knocked out of him by a charismatic art professor. Kidd, the reigning panjandrum of book design, has also edited "Peanuts: The Art of Charles M. Schulz," a handsome volume devoted to the century's best-known comic strip. Together, the two titles form a tribute to American popular taste during the Cold War era. A few other recent books offer insights into the homey masterpieces you're more likely to encounter at yard sales than at the Met.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

An art museum is, after all, an unlikely venue for the works showcased in **PAINT BY NUMBER** (Princeton Architectural Press), by William L. Bird, Jr. But, in their mid-century heyday, these careful renditions of street scenes and wintry farmscapes won prizes in art contests, and they can now be seen at the National Museum of American History, in Washington, D.C. (The book accompanies an exhibition on view until the end of December.) The craft infuriated art critics and became a national craze, prompting the Eisenhower White House to mount a show of paintings by such hobbyists as J. Edgar Hoover and Henry Cabot Lodge.

As Wayne Hemingway claims in **JUST ABOVE THE MANTELPIECE** (Booth-Clibborn), the best-selling print artist in the world isn't Picasso, but rather a guy named Vladimir Tretchikoff. Tretchikoff's exotic women with seaweed-hued faces are avidly collected today, as are Margaret Keane's iconic big-eyed children; they are the stars of this anthology of family-room kitsch. This art might not have earned critical respect, but Andy Warhol offered his support: "If it were bad, so many people wouldn't like it."

—*Mark Rozzo*

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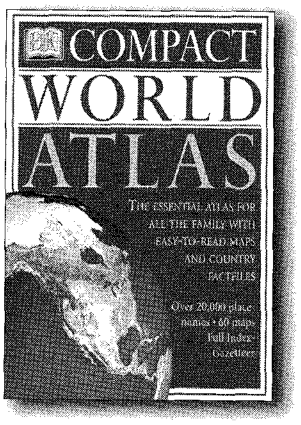
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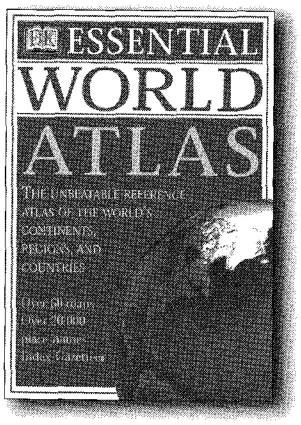
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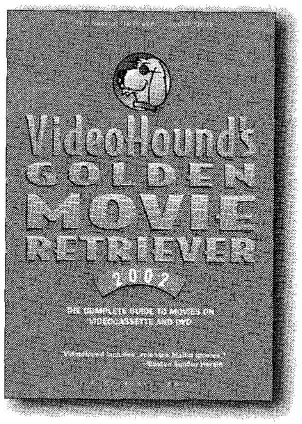
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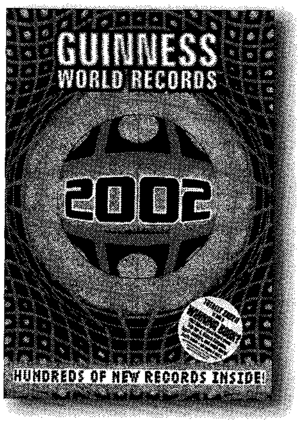
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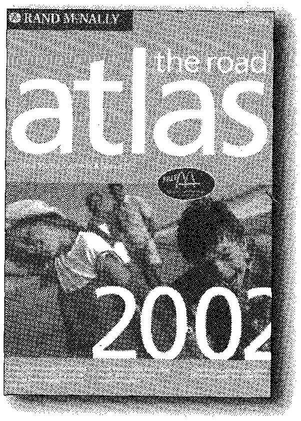
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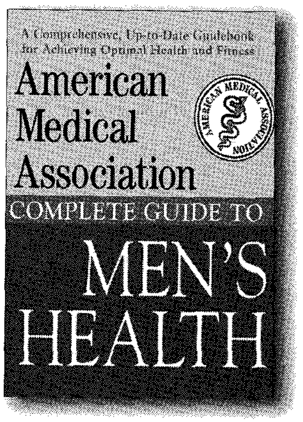
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MOVIES OPENING

BARAN

A drama about a teen-age Iranian boy working at a Teheran construction site who falls in love with an Afghan girl. Directed by Majid Majidi ("The Color of Paradise"). In Farsi. Opening Dec. 7.

B-52

Hartmut Bitomsky's documentary about the B-52 bomber. Opening Dec. 5. (Film Forum.)

THE BUSINESS OF STRANGERS

A successful businesswoman (Stockard Channing) and her assistant (Julia Stiles) match wits, trade lies, and engage in a power struggle while stranded in an airport hotel. Opening Dec. 7.

FINAL

Campbell Scott directed this psychological thriller with Denis Leary as a man who awakes and finds himself a patient in a mental ward four hundred years into the future. Opening Dec. 7.

NO MAN'S LAND

The writer-director Danis Tanovic's satiric drama about a Bosnian (Branko Djuric) and a Serb (Rene Bitorajac) who are trapped in a trench between enemy lines. In Bosnian, French, and English. Opening Dec. 7.

OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 7.

PIÑERO

A bio-pic about Miguel Piñero, the Nuyorican poet, playwright, actor, and heroin addict. Benjamin Bratt plays the lead. Leon Ichaso directed. Opening Dec. 7.

PRINCESA

Henrique Goldman's drama about a Brazilian transsexual (Ingrid de Souza) who travels to Milan to live as a woman. In Portuguese and Italian. Opening Dec. 7. (Quad Cinema.)

TUVALU

A black-and-white, near-silent film from Bavaria about a young boy who has never been outside; instead, he cares for the public swimming pool owned by his blind father. Directed by Veit Helmer. Opening Dec. 7. (Village East Cinemas.)

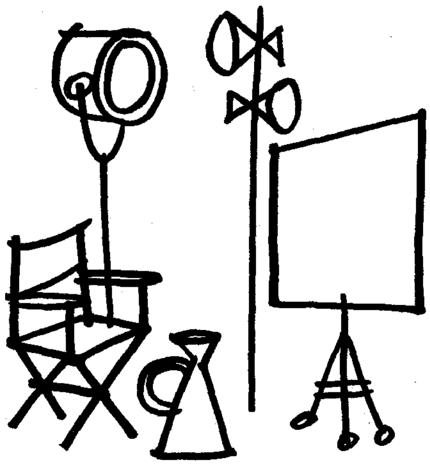
FILM NOTES

AMÉLIE

A waifish Parisienne discovers her mission in life: to bring unexpected happiness to others, and so to herself. Such is the story of Amélie (Audrey Tautou), and the simplicity of it—not to mention its dangerous surfeit of sweetness—appears to have touched a universal nerve. (In truth, the saga of the movie's success is more telling than anything in the movie itself.) Tautou is clearly a find, although one wonders what Mathieu Kassovitz, who plays the object of her affection, made of his role; it was Kassovitz who, in 1995, yanked French cinema up to date with his baring of ethnic hostilities in "La Haine." The Paris of this new movie lies at the other extreme, although what nags at you most is not the neighborly charm but the itchy, unsettled manner of the director, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. How far should we trust a plea for benevolence when it feels like a box of tricks? In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/5/01.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Paris.)

BAY OF ANGELS

What would this 1963 film be like without Jeanne Moreau? Even if the dialogue and direction were the same, the meanings wouldn't be. The picture is almost an emanation of Moreau, and it is inconceivable without her. Written and directed by Jacques Demy, it's rather like a French attempt to get to the essence of a Warners movie of the thirties. Demy not only gets to it, he goes beyond it. His virtuoso sense of film rhythm turns this flimsy, capricious story about a gambling lady into a lyrical study in compulsion and luck. The concept of gambling as almost total spontaneity and irresponsibility is oddly suggestive in this film; we begin to feel that gambling is a bum's existentialism. And Jeanne Moreau, in a very Bette Davis sort of way, dramatizes herself superbly. This is a magical, whirling little film, a triumph of style, even though it runs down to nothing in the last, too quick, too ambiguous shot. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Dec. 5-11.)



BEHIND ENEMY LINES

The Irish director John Moore, who made his mark with flashy television commercials, takes those techniques and applies them to the ballistic speed of modern warfare. Sometimes the results are stunning, as in a sequence involving two persistent surface-to-air missiles; sometimes they are merely incoherent. The war in question is the Bosnian conflict, and, in a daring decision, the movie drops the comedic actor Owen Wilson into a situation worthy of John Rambo. His Navy plane has been shot down on a photo-recon flight over restricted territory, and an entire Serb battalion is looking for him. Wilson seems promising as a hyperverbal Holden Caulfield gone to war, but he's never given the opportunity to develop into an action antihero. The movie is equally one-dimensional: the NATO admiral is reduced to another villain with a bad accent and little respect for American-style justice. The Serbs, of course, are cannon fodder.—*Michael Agger* (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

BOMBAY EUNUCH

A fascinating documentary by the filmmaker Alexandra Shiva about the plight of a group of impoverished eunuchs in India. The film eloquently conveys the day-to-day challenges of a small marginalized community where prostitution and panhandling are the basic means of survival. The contradictory nature of their lives—they walk the poverty-stricken streets in brightly colored saris and perfect makeup (imagine Diana Ross easing on down the road as Ma Joad in "The Grapes of Wrath")—is vivid and jarring. The movie never condescends—it dignifies these social outcasts with a street-smart focus on their bravery and humor. In English, Hindi, and Tamal.—*Bruce Diones* (The Screening Room and the Museum of Modern Art; Dec. 7.)

BRINGING UP BABY

Lunatic comedies of the thirties generally started with an heiress. This one starts with an heiress (Katherine Hepburn) who has a dog, George, and a leopard, Baby. Cary Grant is a paleontologist who has just acquired the bone he needs to complete his dinosaur skeleton. George steals the bone, Grant and Baby chase each other around, the dinosaur collapses—but Grant winds up with Hepburn, and no paleontologist ever got hold of a more beautiful set of bones. The director, Howard Hawks, keeps all this trifling nonsense in such artful balance that it never impinges on the real world; it may be the American movies' closest equivalent to Restoration comedy.—*P.K.* (Cinema Classics; Dec. 8-10.)

CODE UNKNOWN

A mosaic of stories, most of them disheartening. There is the occasional moment in Michael Haneke's film when the characters stumble upon pleasure, but it soon passes; as the title suggests, they have enough trouble establishing lines of communication among themselves. Anne (Juliette Binoche) is an actress whose relations with her lover (Thierry Nouvic) flicker from silence to tiff; Jean (Alexandre Hamidi) is a boy in baffled conflict with his father; Amadou (Ona Lu Yenke) is a young black teacher, arrested for trying to stand up for a beggar; and the beggar herself, Maria (Luminita Gheorghiu), is a Romanian immigrant crumpled with shame. Haneke cuts back and forth from one to the next with such skill, and with so little superfluous detail, that the effect is oddly bracing; his is not the portentous alienation of Antonioni, but the hard, topical distillation of ethnic strife—not of a Europe deep in thought, but of a Europe under fire. In French, with many of the characters speaking their native languages.—*A.L.* (12/3/01) (Quad Cinema.)

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

The Mexican director Guillermo del Toro's supernatural melodrama takes place against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War, in a destitute orphanage, where the ghost of a young boy resides. The movie overreaches when it attempts to be a political allegory but becomes hauntingly atmospheric as it settles down and simplifies its intentions. Del Toro's elegant pacing and gothic touches imbue the proceedings with a cool mystery. In Spanish.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

J. K. Rowling, having drawn even reluctant readers back to the lonely pleasure of a book, is now witnessing their dispersal; her creation, Harry Potter, has finally arrived onscreen, and with him comes a slew of merchandise and, soon enough, a video game. The movie is exactly what you would expect: spirited, efficient, glazed with effects, and almost servile in its fidelity to the novel. Harry is played by Daniel Radcliffe, who, though a touch too old for the part, fills it with unfazed amiability; more successful still, perhaps, are Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, enjoying themselves as his sidekicks. A roll call of British actors infests the staff at Hogwarts School: Richard Harris, Maggie Smith, and Alan Rickman, with the already well-built Robbie Coltrane finding fresh girth as the rumbustious Hagrid. The movie takes its time—the director, Chris Columbus, and his screenwriter, Steve Kloves, seem most interested in portraying good companionship—and yet the final half-hour feels rushed and unarousing. Even before the film opened, the grosses were assured, and yet, for all the magic—the broomsticks, the bank staffed by goblins, the troll in the bathroom—the work itself remains oddly unmagical, grounded in mortal fun.—*A.L.* (11/19/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

HEIST

David Mamet's debonair safecracking movie is high-grade fun all the way through. As Joe Moore, a steely but convivial Boston thief, the great Gene Hackman dispels the Mamet chill (the portentous and equivocal atmosphere of such films as "House of Games" and "The Spanish Prisoner"). Hackman, age seventy-one, sends waves of energy through the entire production. Mamet plays his usual games—the characters are always turning the tables on one another—but this time he's much more involved in the physical life of what he's showing us. The cast includes Rebecca Pidgeon as a hipster moll; Delroy Lindo as Hackman's loyal old friend; and Ricky Jay as a witty utility man who is so quick that he can, without preparation, throw himself in front of a moving car in order to divert the police. Only Sam Rockwell, as a young sleaze, is a disappointment.—*David Denby* (11/12/01) (East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE INDEPENDENT

A good-natured tribute to the silliness of Hollywood—a subject the director Stephen Kessler presumably knows well (his previous effort was "Na-

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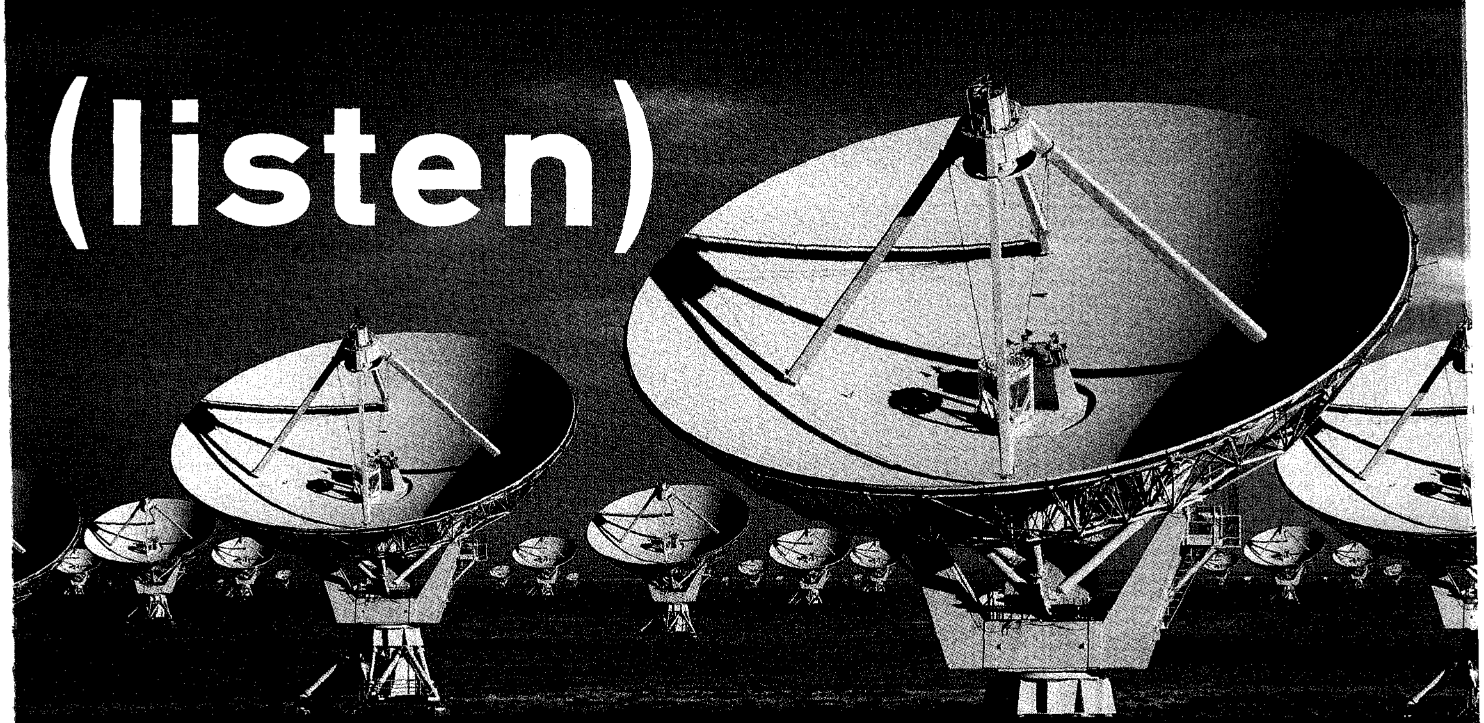

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tional Lampoon's Vegas Vacation"). Jerry Stiller plays Morty Fineman, the producer of more than three hundred B movies with titles like "Lawn Honkie," "Nuclear Nun," and "Joan of Arkansas." The new millennium has not been as productive: Fineman's latest project, "Ms. Kevorkian" is undergoing financial meltdown while he's being stalked by a rabid pair of documentarians. Kessler and his co-writer, Mike Wilkins, pack the movie with the kind of great lines that are culled from cocktail napkins. Better yet are the fake clips from Fineman's archives, beginning with an Army training film "The Simplex Complex" and reaching a peak of sorts with a new interpretation of "Free Willy." Real-life luminaries like Nick Cassavetes and Ron Howard add their own distorted wisdom, and Peter Bogdanovich has a funny cameo sizing up Fineman's career as though he were a latter-day Hitchcock.—*M.A.* (Union Square.)

Benjamin Bratt in "Piñero," opening December 7.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

IN THE BEDROOM

In Camden, Maine, a twenty-one-year-old college student, Frank (Nick Stahl), is having a headlong summer affair with a local woman, Natalie (Marisa Tomei), who has two little boys. Natalie is separated from her husband (William Mapother), the loutish scion of a prominent local family. When the husband kills his rival, Frank's hypercivilized parents (Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek) begin to consider vengeance as a way of saving themselves from destroying each other. This Sophoclean tale, fleshed out from an intriguing, elliptical short story by Andre Dubus, draws its strength from minute observation of settings, moods, and manners in Camden and from a gradual tightening of the winch. Much of it is very quiet (the first-time director, Todd Field, is an actor and a photographer), but when it explodes, the violence, both verbal and physical, actually means something.—*D.D.* (11/26/01) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

JUNG (WAR) IN THE LAND OF THE MUJAHEDDIN

In this lacerating Italian documentary, Afghan men, women, and children living under the control of the Northern Alliance address the camera without hesitation or artifice—they have developed a genius for tirade, the art of defeated populations. Made by Fabrizio Lazzaretti, Alberto Vendemmiati, and Giuseppe Petitto, the documentary was shot in 1999 and 2000, during an earlier phase of the war between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban, and it chronicles the attempts of a Milanese surgeon, Gino Strada, to set up a decent hospital. Massive, bearded, and profane, Strada is the most persistent and humane hero in any recent movie, but one's interest is held most forcefully by the Afghans, particularly a prematurely aged woman, photographed through the prison-bar lattice opening of her burka, who insists that the Afghans "want to die, but not even death wants the people of Afghanistan." In Dari and Italian.—*D.D.* (11/26/01) (Cinema Village.)

LIFE AS A HOUSE

Kevin Kline gives a persuasive and ornery performance as a middle-aged failure who devotes himself to building a dream house on the golden cliffs of California. He plays an architect who doesn't think much of himself but is determined to follow his own path, and Kline's face is lit by anger in ways that we've never seen from him in movies. Much of the picture, until the tear-dripping conclusion, is charming. As the house goes up, various people drop in to saw a few boards, flirt, or make mischief. Kristin Scott Thomas, relaxing onscreen for the first time, plays George's rueful ex-wife. Hayden Christensen is his sixteen-year-old son—pierced, eyeshadowed, and drugged.—*D.D.* (10/29/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

The latest Coen-brothers project is shot in smooth, glittering monochrome: a calmly told tale of murder without mayhem. We are on the brink of the nineteen-fifties, with its distinctive fears and badges of honor: Big Dave (James Gandolfini) can still lay claim to a good war record, while his wife, in all honesty, reports a visit from outer space. Billy Bob Thornton plays Ed, a barber living quietly with his wife (Frances McDormand) in northern California. He tries his hand at blackmail, and the plan misfires—justice catches up with him in the end, although, even then, he is the wrong man. Unfortunately, Thornton is so cool in the role that you simply don't believe that he would pass unnoticed. The whole film has the air of a clever, unthrilling conceit—a guided tour of film noir, without the sweat and compulsions of the real thing. With Tony Shalhoub, stealing the picture as a lawyer de-luxe.—*A.L.* (11/5/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and Village Theatre VII.)

MONSTERS, INC.

A thoroughly charming movie from the artists and storytellers at Pixar which wins you over with its jazzy, retro title sequence and then introduces the pun-filled world of Monstropolis, where creatures of all description toil in factories, collecting the screams of children. The visual invention is on par with Pixar's previous effort, "Toy Story 2," but the crazy quilt of cultural references and back-door subversiveness of that movie gets toned down for something more sugary. John Goodman and Billy Crystal give voice to the two heroes, but the gold star goes to John Ratzenberger (Cliff from "Cheers") for his homespun Abominable Snowman.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinema, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

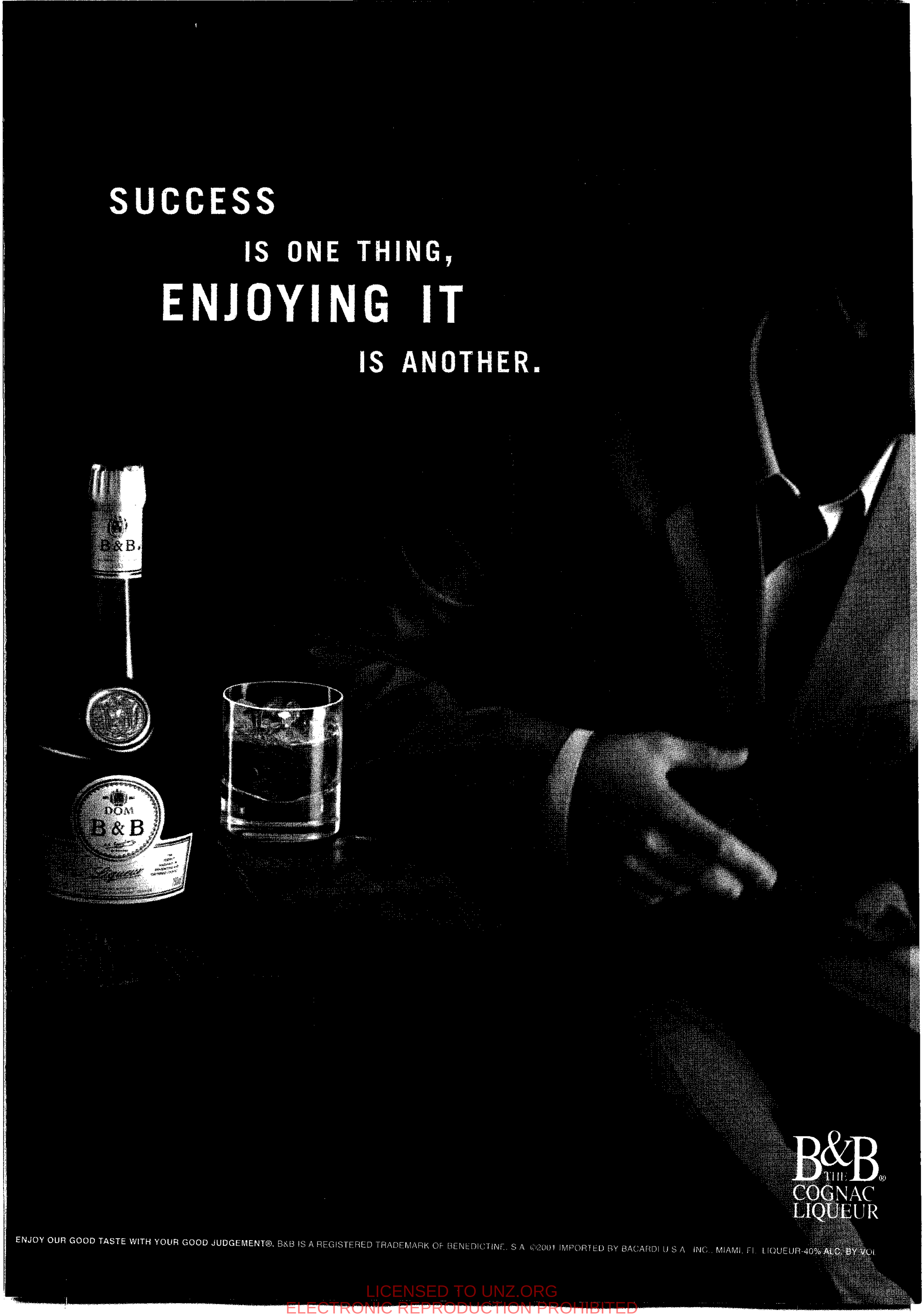
A woman wanders away from a car wreck and into a strange house. Little old people scurry under the foot of a door, squeaking like mice. Yes, it's a David Lynch project. This one began life as a TV pilot; you can just imagine the aghast faces of the network executives as they saw what they had commissioned. In the event, the elongated weirdness, stretching to two and a half hours, feels discomfortingly at home on the larger screen; if you ever wanted to see an epic horror soap, this is what it would look like. Many established Lynch motifs are in place, most of them summoned from one corner or another of the nineteen-fifties: the innocent blonde (Naomi Watts), the baffled brunette (Laura Elena Harring), the clueless cop (Robert Forster). Addicts of the director will tie themselves in knots trying to pick the lock of the film; the rest of us can lie back and enjoy the spooking. With Justin Theroux and, as a tough old landlady, Ann Miller. Yes, *that* Ann Miller.—*A.L.* (10/8/01) (Chelsea West, 59th Street East Cinema, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOVOCAINE

Noir without the lighting. Steve Martin plays a dentist who falls for one of his patients; trouble ensues. All the hardboiled elements are here: the voice-over narration of the good guy gone bad, the femme fatale, the supportive girlfriend, the unavoidable murder. But, as the writer-director David Atkins twists the clichés of the genre, his film becomes a mishmash of numbing comedy and incoherent motivations.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, and Lincoln Square.)

SPY GAME

Or, blond on blond. Robert Redford plays an old-school C.I.A. agent, a cynical, manipulative sort who harbors a rebellious, anti-bureaucratic streak. Brad Pitt is his protégé, a hotshot who disapproves of his boss's amorality. The movie is set in 1991, on the last day of Redford's career in the agency.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"B-52," at Film Forum.

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Pitt has been arrested by the Chinese, and Michael Frost Beckner and David Arata's complicated screenplay lays out Redford's attempt to save him and intercuts it with flashbacks of their tortuous relationship as it unfolded in locales like Vietnam, Berlin, and Beirut. Tony Scott's visual panache, as always, obscures most of the issues raised by the script. The movie comes out against callousness of using people for political ends while treating most of the people around the two gleaming stars as callously as possible.—*D.D.* (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

WAKING LIFE
Like many revolutionary films, it has its longueurs, but Richard Linklater's first animated work, a painterly extension of reality, is astoundingly lovely and touching. He shot the material as a live-action feature and then turned the footage over to a team of animation artists, headed by Bob Sabiston, who enhanced and decorated each sequence. The resulting interplay between words and animation is both haunting and startlingly witty. What we see is an unformed young man (Wiley Wiggins) walking around Austin, Texas, where he encounters the coffeehouse Kierkegaards and ecstatically articulate bums who populated Linklater's initial triumph, "Slacker." (Most of the participants are local celebrities, not actors.) The young man thinks he's awake, but actually he's caught in an endless dream. Since the talk he hears is directed toward themes of reverie, apprehension, and death, we begin to wonder, after a while, if we are not witnessing his last moments of consciousness.—*D.D.* (11/12/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.

FAT GIRL
Pioneer and The Screening Room.

FOCUS
Cinema 3 and Village East Cinemas.

MOULIN ROUGE
Empire 25, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.

THE OTHERS
Eastside Playhouse, Empire 25, and Village East Cinemas.

SHALLOW HAL
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.

SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK
East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.

TAPE
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.

TREMBLING BEFORE G-D
Film Forum.

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Cinema Village.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

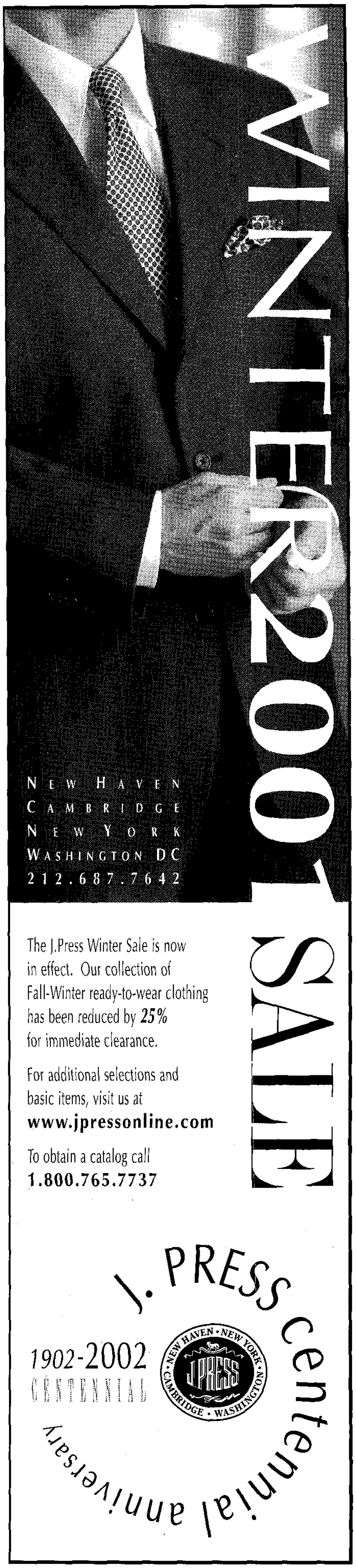
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 16: "Master Class: The Art of Film Editing." Dec. 8 at 2: "The Silence of the Lambs" (1991, Jonathan Demme), followed by a discussion with the film's editor, Craig McKay. ♦ Dec. 9 at 2: "Apocalypse Now Redux" (2001, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ Repertory nights. Dec. 8-9 at 6:30: "Flowers of Shanghai" (1998, Hou Hsiao-Hsien; in Mandarin).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—The musical documentaries of Gary Keys. Dec. 6-7 at 7, Dec. 8 at 7 and 9, and Dec. 9 at 4 and 8:45: "Cuba: Island of Music" (2000). ♦ Dec. 6 at 9, Dec. 8 at 2, and Dec. 9 at 6: "Memories of Duke" (1980) and "Mexican Suite" (1970). ♦ Dec. 7 at 9, Dec. 8 at 5, and Dec. 9 at 2: "Good Time Sunday"



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(1992). ♦ Dec. 7-8 at 9:30: "The Short Attention Span Film & Video Festival," more than sixty movies that are two minutes or shorter.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Dec. 5 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Love Come Down" (2000, Clément Virgo). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "No Ford in the Fire" (1967, Gleb Panfilov; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 7 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Brief Encounters" (1967, Kira Muratova; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 8 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Once Upon a Time a Hero in China" (1992, Lee Lik-Chi; in Cantonese). ♦ Dec. 9 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Once Upon a Time in China II" (1992, Tsui Hark; in Cantonese). ♦ Dec. 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Debut" (1970, Panfilov; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The First Teacher" (1965, Andrei Konchalovsky; in Russian).

CINEMA CLASSICS
332 E. 11th St. (677-5368)—Dec. 5-6: "The Front Page" (1931, Lewis Milestone). ♦ Dec. 6: "My Little Chickadee" (1940, Edward Cline). ♦ Dec. 8-10: "Bringing Up Baby" (†). ♦ Dec. 8 at midnight: "Rock 'n' Roll High School" (1979, Allan Arkush). ♦ Dec. 10-11: "The Grapes of Wrath" (1940, John Ford).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Dec. 5-11 at 1:30, 3:10, 4:50, 6:30, 8:10, and 9:50: "Bay of Angels" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—A tribute to Jeanne Moreau. Dec. 11 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Jules and Jim" (1962, François Truffaut; in French).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—Through Jan. 11: "Brazil on Screen." All films are in Portuguese. Dec. 5 at 7 and Dec. 8 at 7: "Carnaval Atlântida" (1953, José Carlos Burle). ♦ Dec. 7 at 7 and Dec. 8 at 3: "To Kill or to Run" (1954, Carlos Manga).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Dec. 6-16: "Documentary Fortnight." Dec. 6 at 3:30: "Third World Newsreel: Call to Media Action" (2001). ♦ Dec. 6 at 6: "Investigation of a Flame" (2001, Lynne Sachs). ♦ Dec. 7 at 2:30: "Chrissy" (1999, Jacqui North). ♦ Dec. 7 at 6: "Bombay Eunuch" (†). ♦ Dec. 7 at 8:15: "Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime of Dance" (2000, Charles Atlas). ♦ Dec. 8 at 12: "Everyday Stories" (2000, Andrés Habegger; in Spanish). ♦ Dec. 8 at 2: "Japanese Devils" (2000, Minoru Matsui; in Japanese). ♦ Dec. 8 at 5:30: A tribute to William Greaves. ♦ Dec. 9 at 12:30: "Prison de Femmes" (1999, Elsbeth Dijkstra; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 9 at 2: "The Cucumber Incident" (2001, Bonita Makuch and Melodie Calvert). ♦ Dec. 9 at 5: "Gotteszell" (2001, Helga Reidemeister; in German). ♦ Dec. 10 at 3:30: "The Americans of Samaná" (1998/2001, Andrea Robbins and Max Becher). ♦ Dec. 10 at 6: "Children of Shadows" (2001, Karen Kramer). ♦ Dec. 11 at 2:30: "Atomic Ed and the Black Hole" (2001, Ellen Spiro). ♦ Dec. 11 at 3:30: "Cunnamulla" (2000, Dennis O'Rourke). ♦ Dec. 11 at 6: "Keep the River on Your Right: A Modern Cannibal Tale" (2001, David Shapiro and Laurie Gwen Shapiro).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Dec. 6: "Silence to Sound." Dec. 5 at 8: "Tide of Empire" (1929, Allan Dwan). ♦ Dec. 6 at 1 and 8: "I Was Born, But . . ." (1932, Yasujiro Ozu). ♦ Through Dec. 27: "Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 7 at 1 and 7:30 and Dec. 8 at 8:30: "Broken Silence" (2001, Montxo Armendáriz). ♦ Dec. 7 at 3:15 and Dec. 9 at 8: "Welcome, Mr. Marshall!" (1952, Luis García Berlanga). ♦ Dec. 7 at 5:20 and Dec. 8 at 6:20: "No Shame" (2001, Joaquin Oristrell). ♦ Dec. 8 at 1 and Dec. 10 at 1 and 5: "Tasio" (1984, Armendáriz). ♦ Dec. 8 at 3:15 and Dec. 11 at 1: "Madness of Love" (2001, Vicente Aranda). ♦ Dec. 9 at 1: "Strangers to Themselves" (2001, José Luis López Linares and Javier Rioyo). ♦ Dec. 9 and Dec. 11 at 3:15: "Buñuel and King Solomon's Table" (2001, Carlos Saura). ♦ Dec. 9 at 5:30: "Anita Takes a Chance" (2001, Ventura Pons). ♦ Dec. 10 at 3 and 9:30: "27 Hours" (1986, Armendáriz).

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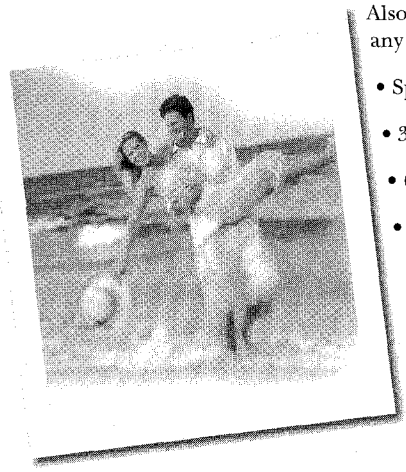

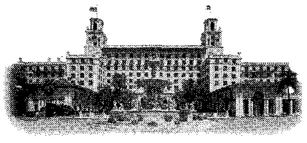

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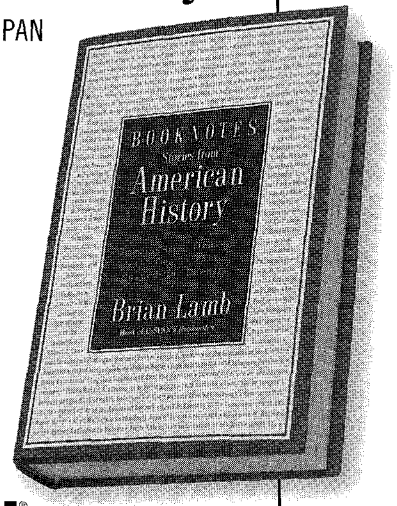

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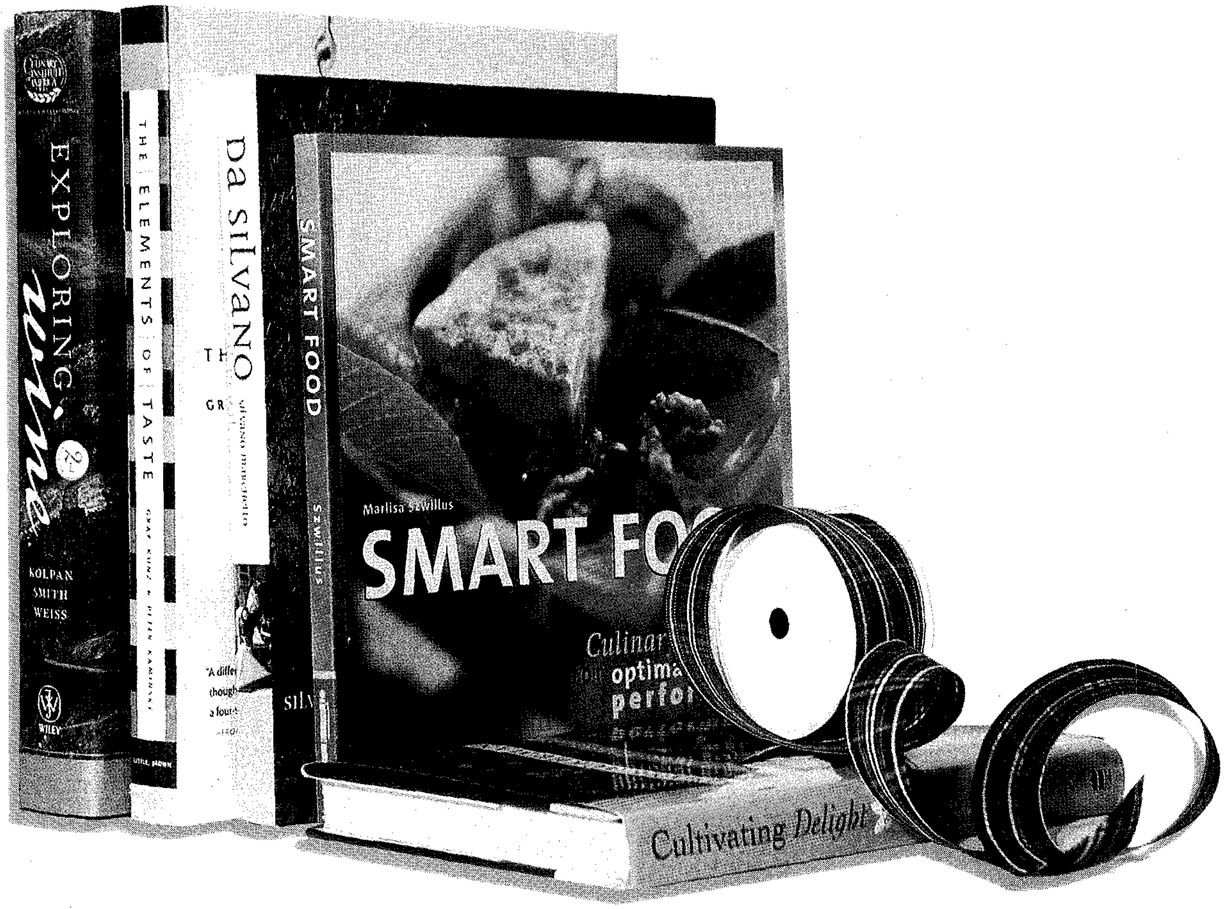
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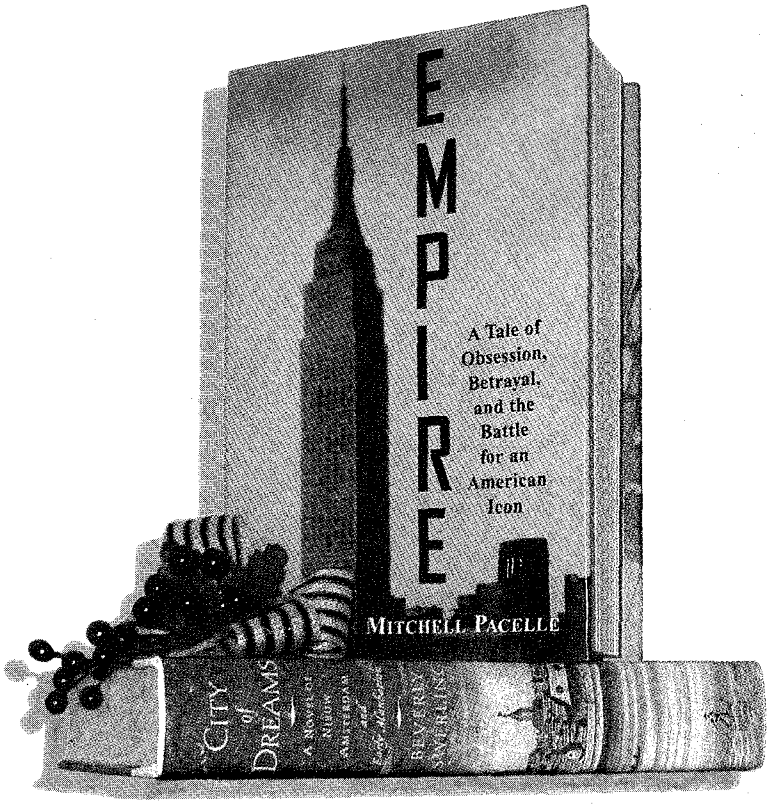
APPLE OF OUR EYE

The nation has understandably been focused on its largest metropolis of late. New York City, past and present, is on display in new works of fiction and nonfiction.

Calling it "a wonderful epic novel" Dave Kaverman, of Little Professor Book Company in Fort Wayne, Indiana, recommends **City of Dreams: A Novel of Nieuw Amsterdam and Early Manhattan** (Simon & Schuster) by Beverly Swerling. This saga, spanning a period from seventeenth-century Dutch New Amsterdam to the Revolutionary War, tracks the transformation of New York City while relating the fascinating story of a clan of surgeons and physicians. Kaverman notes that in addition to creating compelling characters, Swerling's exacting research "exposes the social and medical mores of the day."

Its stature underscored by recent events, the Empire State Building resonates with its creators' singular brand of drive and ambition. Mitchell Pacelle's **Empire: A Tale of Obsession, Betrayal, and the Battle for an American Icon** (John Wiley & Sons) reveals the hidden war behind the battle for this ultimate prize in the Manhattan skyline. Savoring the book's colorful cast of characters—including Leona Helmsley and Donald Trump—Nancy Brown, of R.J. Julia Booksellers in Madison, Connecticut, calls this book "a real delight" offering "amazing social, political, and financial history."


EMPIRE
A Tale of Obsession, Betrayal, and the Battle for an American Icon
MITCHELL PACELLE
CITY of DREAMS
A Novel of Nieuw Amsterdam and Early Manhattan
BEVERLY SWERLING

WORLD AT LARGE

Great books can transport us to new places and introduce us to unfamiliar lifestyles. Several recent books offer just the ticket for an enchanting armchair travel experience as well as some illuminating insights into other cultures.

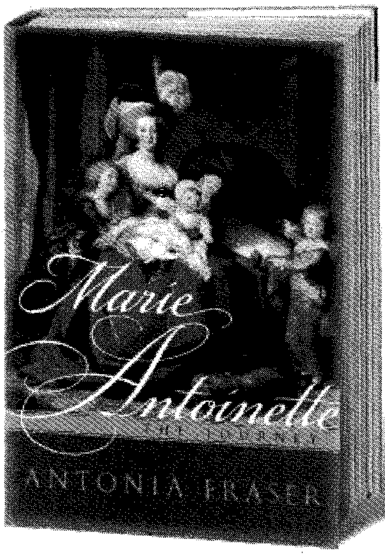
While at first, **My Name is Red** (Alfred A. Knopf) by Orhan Pamuk may seem a conventional whodunit, it quickly evolves into something unique—an amalgam of mystery, politics, theology, and love. Set in sixteenth-century Istanbul, the mystery novel (just translated from Turkish) seeks to unravel the murder of a prominent miniaturist and

PUBLISHER'S PICK

Author of the acclaimed "Corelli's Mandolin," Louis de Bernières offers a collection of tall tales about a legendary dog who lives in a town on the northwestern coast of Australia. *The Los Angeles Times* describes **Red Dog** (Pantheon Books) as "a sweet tale, part bedtime story, part lullaby."

Behind every great gift, a world of thought.

GREAT LIVES


Marie Antoinette
THE JOURNEY
ANTONIA FRASER

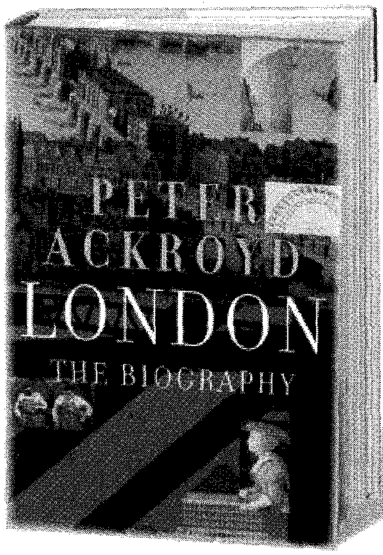
Marie Antoinette

ANTONIA FRASER

"Antonia Fraser's latest and finest biography—the only one to offer a thoroughly nuanced portrait of the French queen."
—*Vogue*

***New York Times* Bestseller**

GREAT CITIES


PETER ACKROYD
LONDON
THE BIOGRAPHY

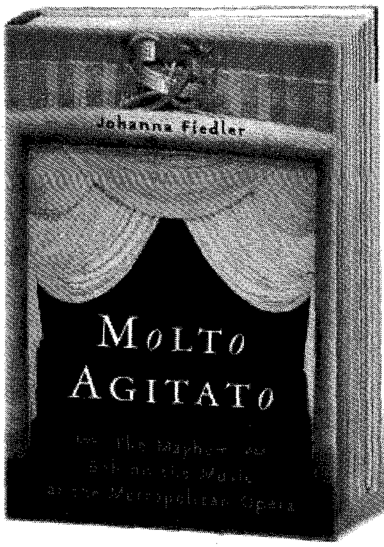
LONDON

PETER ACKROYD

"Rollicking... if London had the ability to choose its biographer it undoubtedly would tap Peter Ackroyd." —*Vanity Fair*

Go to **www.fodors.com** for a free excerpt of ***London*** and an exclusive interview with Peter Ackroyd. Inspired to plan a trip? Check out Fodor's ***London 2002*** for everything you need to experience Peter Ackroyd's living London.

Great drama

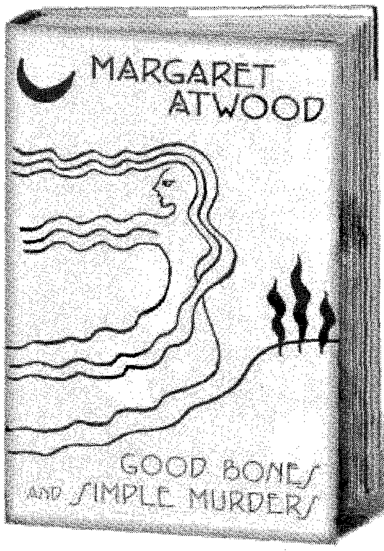

Johanna Fiedler
MOLTO AGITATO

MOLTO AGITATO

Johanna Fiedler

"A lively history of an institution often involved in controversy and personality clashes."
—*Publishers Weekly*

GREAT WRITING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GOOD BONES AND SIMPLE MURDERS

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—*Vanity Fair*

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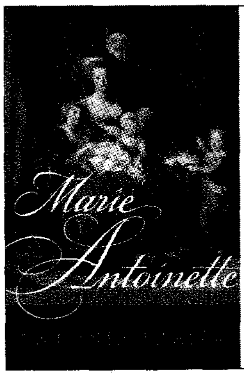
The Last Summer of Reason
by Tahar Djaout
MY NAME IS RED
NEKROPOLIS

manuscript illuminator. Among the many themes touched on is the role of art in Islam. Leigh Winterbottom, of Verbatim Booksellers in Vail, Colorado, writes that "If you're in the mood for something very different, try this upcoming classic."

Teeming with titles espousing every imaginable political viewpoint, religion, and interest, bookstores epitomize the principle of freedom in our open society. Bookseller Linda Cohen, of Little Professor Book Company in Temecula, California, notes that **The Last Summer of Reason** (Ruminator Books) by the late Tahar Djaout illustrates a dramatic dilemma. Set in the author's native Algeria, this novel chronicles the experiences of a bookstore owner in an increasingly oppressive society, where all the arts are viewed as competing with God. Discovered after Djaout was assassinated, the book is, according to Cohen, "a chilling testimonial to the encroaching dangers of censorship worldwide."

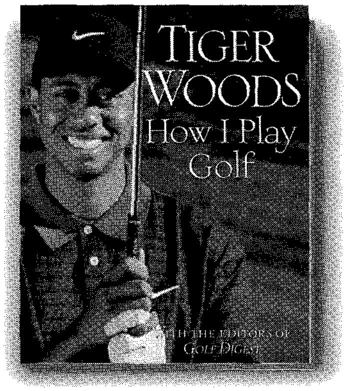
Though usually set in the future, the most haunting fantasies of science fiction reveal much of the past and present. Peering ahead to twenty-second-century Morocco, Maureen F. McHugh's **Nekropolis** (Eos) envisions a desolate land reeling in the wake of scientific innovations while at the same time isolated by its own religious mandate. Kelly Justice, of Fountain Bookstore in Richmond, Virginia, marvels at McHugh's "future Northern Africa, with all of its potential cultural and technological permutations."


Marie Antoinette

PUBLISHER'S PICK

Infamous for a casual comment about cake, Marie Antoinette emerges as a woman of substantial complexity and character in Antonia Fraser's new biography **Marie Antoinette: The Journey** *(Doubleday). Drawing on a wealth of family letters and other archival materials, Fraser offers new insight into one of history's most misunderstood figures.*

ONE-STOP
HOLIDAY SHOPPING


TIGER WOODS
How I Play Golf
WITH THE EDITORS OF GOLF DIGEST

"This book reads as if Woods is right there with the golfer."
—*Publishers Weekly*
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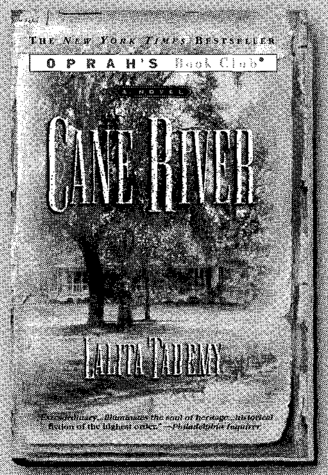
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CANE RIVER
LALITA TADEMY

"Highly personal, often heart-rending...truly inspirational."
—*Dallas Morning News*
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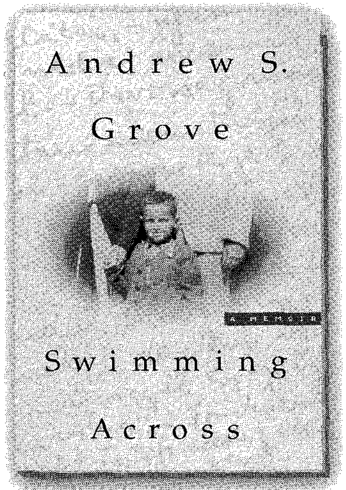
Andrew S. Grove
A MEMOIR
Swimming Across

"A poignant memoir of the coming-of-age of one of America's phenomenal success stories."
—Henry Kissinger
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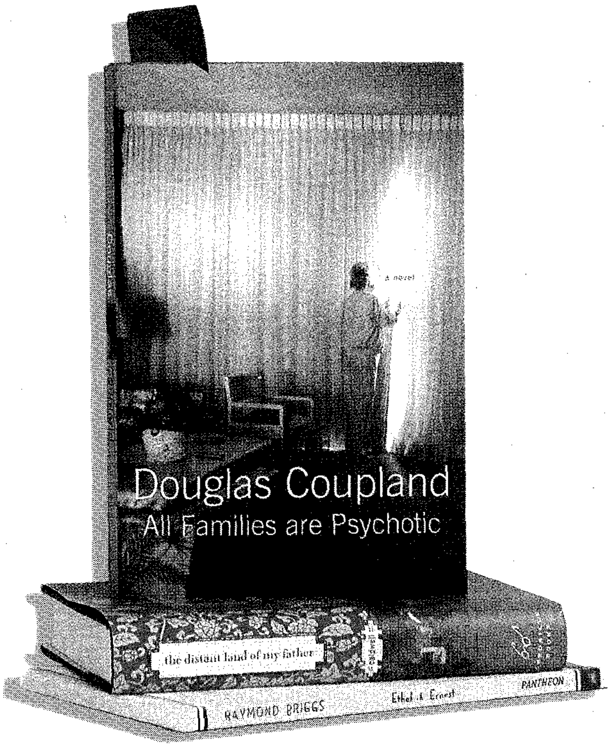
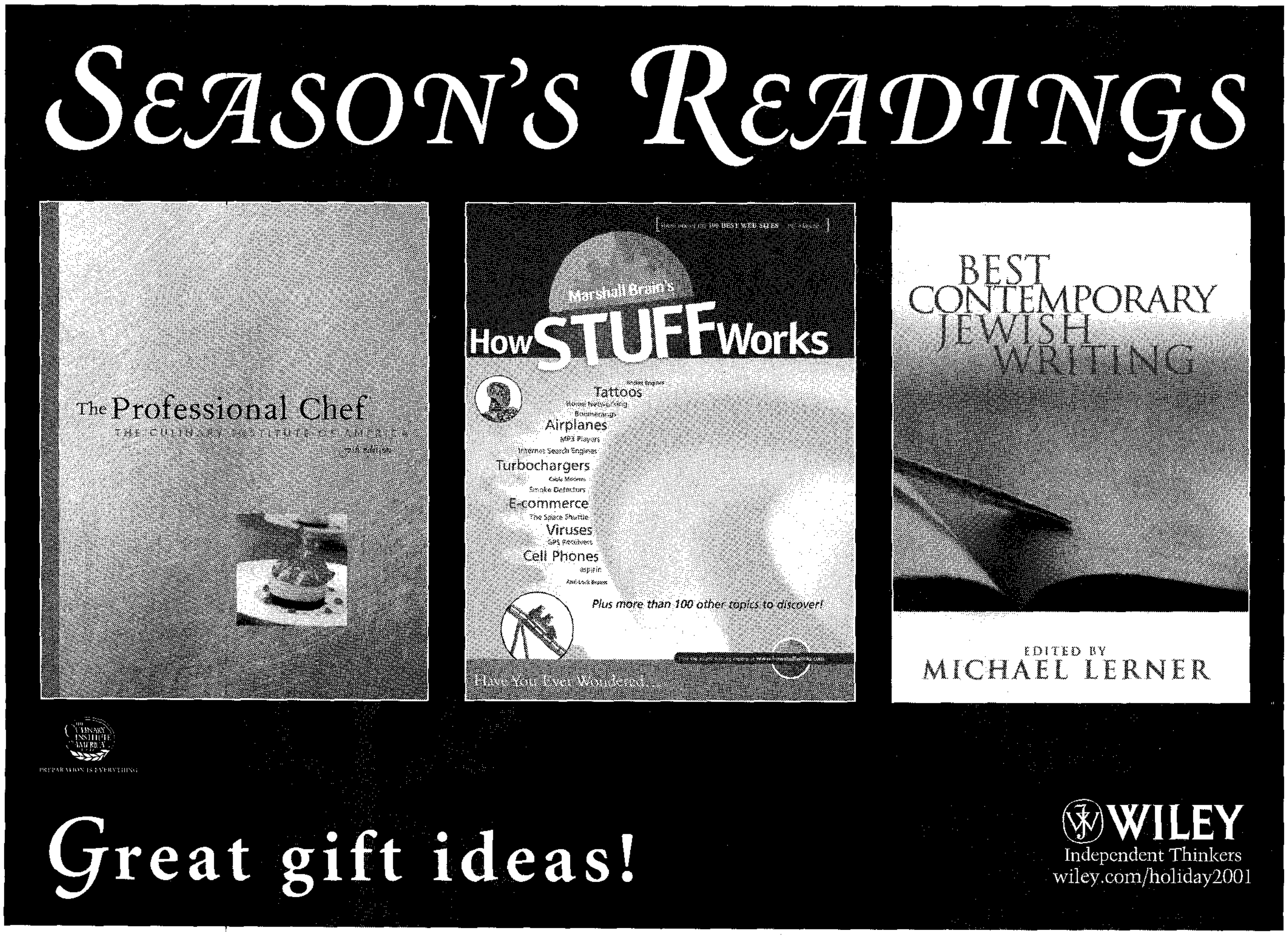
PUBLISHER'S PICK
His success inspired millions. His ideas changed business forever. Now legendary General Electric CEO Jack Welch, whom *Fortune* magazine called the ultimate manager of the twentieth century, reveals in his own words what it takes to succeed. Co-authored by John A. Byrne, **Jack: Straight From the Gut** (Warner Books) is vintage Jack Welch. Down-to-earth, powerful, and filled with common sense.

GROWING WISE
The holidays never fail to celebrate the comforting allure of home and hearth. Great gift books this year evoke the diverse wonder of our homesteads, from the backyard garden to thoughtful concoctions in the kitchen.

Diane Ackerman's **Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden** (HarperCollins) eloquently




SEASON'S READINGS

The Professional Chef
THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA
7th Edition

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Tattoos
Airplanes
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E-commerce
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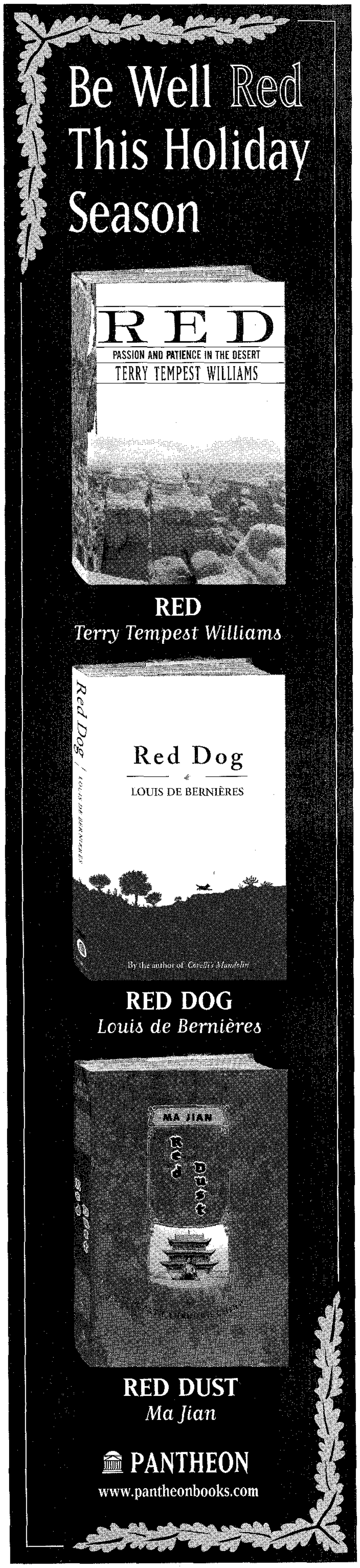

Be Well Red This Holiday Season

RED
PASSION AND PATIENCE IN THE DESERT
TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

RED
Terry Tempest Williams

Red Dog
LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES
By the author of Corelli's Mandolin

RED DOG
Louis de Bernières

RED DUST
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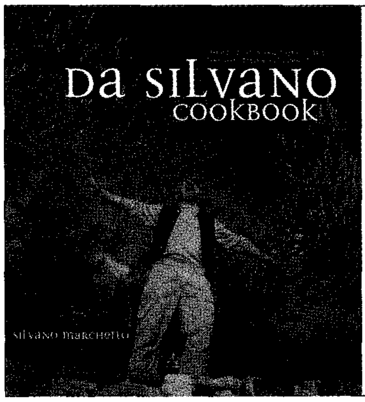
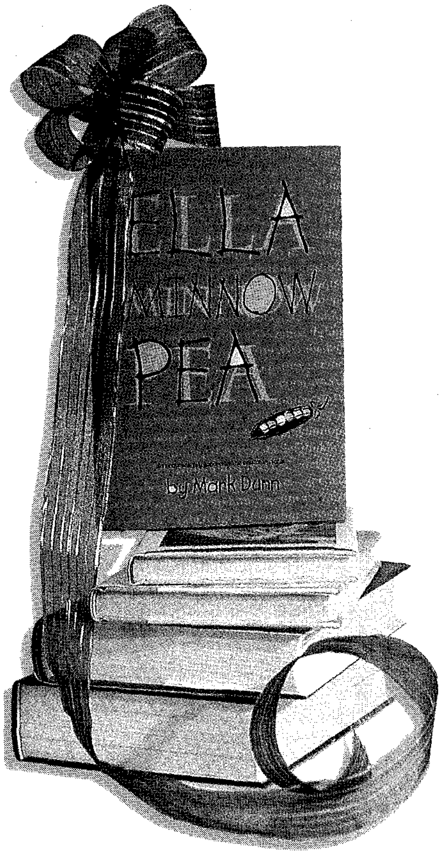


PUBLISHER'S PICK
For the last twenty-five years, Silvano Marchetto has been charming celebrities and locals alike at his Manhattan restaurant. Infused with his larger-than-life personality, **Da Silvano Cookbook** (Bloomsbury) is a cookbook both eminently usable and beautiful that sparkles with the pleasures to be discovered while preparing and eating fresh Italian cuisine.

celebrates the extravagance and sanctuary offered by her backyard garden over the course of the four seasons. "In all my years of bookselling, I've never read a book whose title so accurately described its contents," says Debbie Clough, of Scott's Bookstore in Mt. Vernon, Washington.

The gastronomical brainchild of Marlisa Szwillus, **Smart Food: Culinary Delights for Optimal Gray Cell Performance** (Silverback Books) serves up recipes both simple and smart, based on recent scientific studies that have demonstrated a link between brain function and nutrition. Describing her own experience after becoming a devotee of the recipes, Amy Wynn, of Builders Booksource in Berkeley, California, says: "On top of eating yummy meals, I always feel more attentive the next day."



A FAMILY AFFAIR

Tolstoy once noted that while happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. He may have been thinking about the holidays, when family unity as well as angst take center stage. Portraits of families—both happy and dysfunctional—make perfect presents at Christmastime.

A chance meeting of a milkman and a lady's maid set into motion a remarkable lifelong union. In his charming memoir, **Ethel and Ernest: A True Story** (Alfred A. Knopf), Raymond Briggs offers a loving tribute to his parents, retracing their remarkable life together from 1928 to 1971. "Told in picture form, Brigg's small paintings portray a wonderful segment of English life," notes Martha Holland, of Concord Bookshop in Concord, Massachusetts.

Douglas Coupland has trained a critical eye on everything from the alienation of technology to

Gen X anomie. With **All Families Are Psychotic** (Bloomsbury), he has created one of the most dysfunctional families in fiction. As the backbiting, caustic, and virulent Drummond family crisscrosses Florida enroute to observe the launch of their youngest daughter into space, all hell breaks loose—and then it gets worse. Nancy Olson, of Quail Ridge Books & Music in Raleigh, North Carolina, read the book while on vacation and "laughed all the way across Europe."

The powerful bond between a father and his daughter, separated by war, lies at the heart of Bo Caldwell's novel, **The Distant Land of My Father** (Chronicle Books). Miki Higuchi, of Kepler's Books & Magazines in Menlo Park, California, notes: "This book is a touching tale of a daughter's attempt to understand why her father chose to stay in the land he loved, despite the resulting separation from his family. It's also a fascinating look at Shanghai during the Japanese occupation."

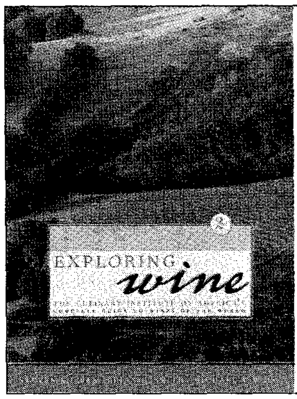
PRESENT NOVELTIES

What better gift for friends and family members than the indulgence of a diverting and imaginative novel? This year's crop gives you plenty of options to consider.

In the spirit of Tracy Chevalier's "Girl with a Pearl Earring," Harriet Scott Chessman brilliantly illuminates the passion and personality

PUBLISHER'S PICK

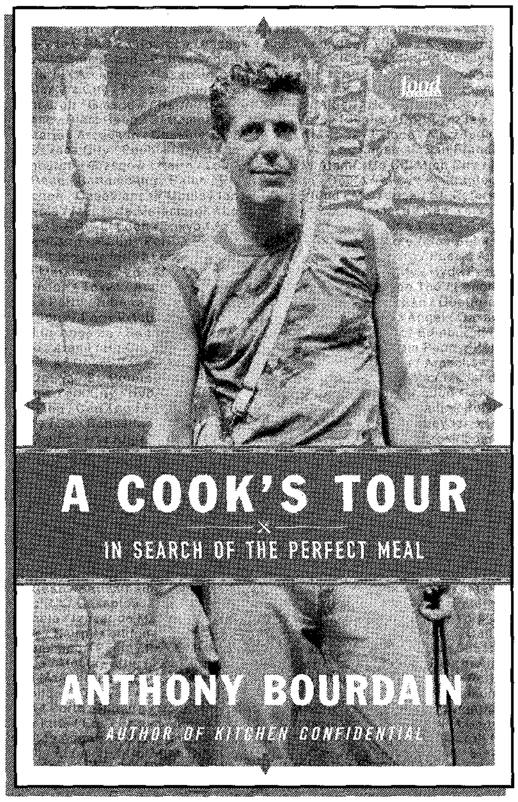
Readers have had a lengthy love affair with the words of John Updike. His latest collection of stories **Licks of Love** (Ballantine Books) explores some of the ways love exerts its spell on us. The centerpiece of the collection is "Rabbit Remembered," a sad and funny postscript to Updike's Rabbit series.



PUBLISHER'S PICK

Prepare for the holidays with the new edition of **Exploring Wine: The Culinary Institute of America's Complete Guide to Wines of the World** (John Wiley & Sons) by Steven Kolpan, Brian H. Smith, and Michael A. Weiss. In this lively guide, the experts who train today's leading chefs and sommeliers explore everything you ever wanted to know about the history, culture, romance, science, and business of wine.

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL*



Inspired by the question 'What would be the perfect meal?', Chef Anthony Bourdain sets out around the world on a quest for his culinary holy grail.

'Bourdain's prose is utterly riveting, swaggering with stylish machismo and a precise ear for kitchen patois.'—*New York*

'Brilliant...half-genius, half-rebel, and altogether compelling.'—*Food Arts*

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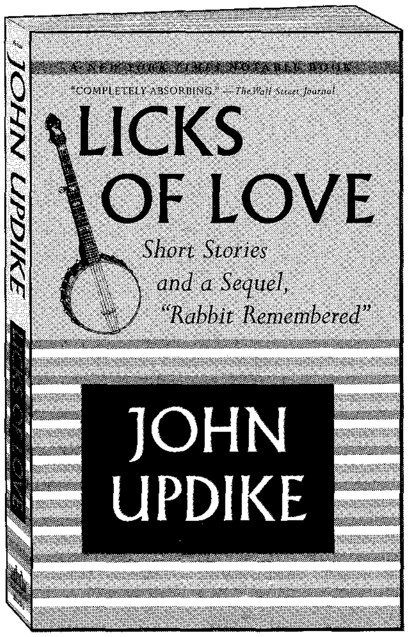
A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK
"COMPLETELY ABSORBING." —The Wall Street Journal
LICKS OF LOVE
Short Stories and a Sequel, "Rabbit Remembered"
JOHN UPDIKE

"[Updike's] observations eddy and swirl into the main stream of his narrative, swelling it with life."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Glimmering.... Seductive....John Updike hits his stride."
—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Completely absorbing."
—*The Wall Street Journal*

"*Rabbit Remembered* is a thing of rich satisfaction.... Impossible to forget."
—*The Boston Sunday Globe*

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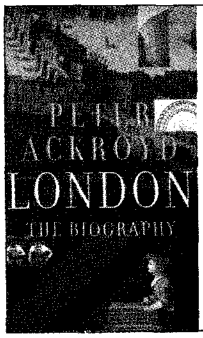
DIAMOND
MATTHEW HART
PETER SIMON
I and EYE
Pictures

captured in the portraits by Mary Cassatt. In **Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper** (The Permanent Press and Seven Stories Press), Chessman imagines the reflections of the terminally ill Lydia as she poses for some of her sister's most unusual paintings. Lesley Kleiser, of the Montgomery Book Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, notes: "To admire an artist's work, and then to create an imaginative world for the reader to enjoy is a wonderful art form in and of itself."

In the novel **Ella Minnow Pea: A Progressively Lipogrammatic Epistolary Fable** (MacAdam/Cage Publishing), author Mark Dunn imagines life on a small island where the inventor of the pangram, "The Quick Brown Fox Jumps Over The Lazy Dog," is a national hero. However, trouble arrives (with a capital "T") when the letters, one by one, begin falling off his monument. Could this be a message from beyond the grave? As each letter falls, that letter is banned. Susan Wasson, of Bookworks in Albuquerque, New Mexico, describes this fascinating fable as "a must-read for everyone who loves words. A treasure!"

Though Lewis Carroll's satiric tales of Alice are oft retold, the real-life story of his complex relationship with the young Alice Liddel has disappeared down the rabbit hole. In **Still She Haunts Me** (Dial Press), Katie Roiphe imagines what transpired between the novelist and his muse. Describing the book as "a Lolita set in Wonderland," Kristina Orchard-Hays, of Bernal Books in San Francisco, notes that "events become 'curiouser and curiouser' right up to the tangled, tragic ending."



PUBLISHER'S PICK

In his book **London: The Biography** (Doubleday), Peter Ackroyd casts one of the world's most vibrant cities as a living and breathing organism, with its own unique mandate for growth and change. Reveling in the city's riches as well as its raucousness, Ackroyd traces London's evolution from the time of the Druids to the dawn of the twenty-first century.

REAL GEMS

Destined for domestic perches from the nightstand to the coffee table, the latest in nonfiction offers fascinating forays into everything from comics to cartels to counterculture.

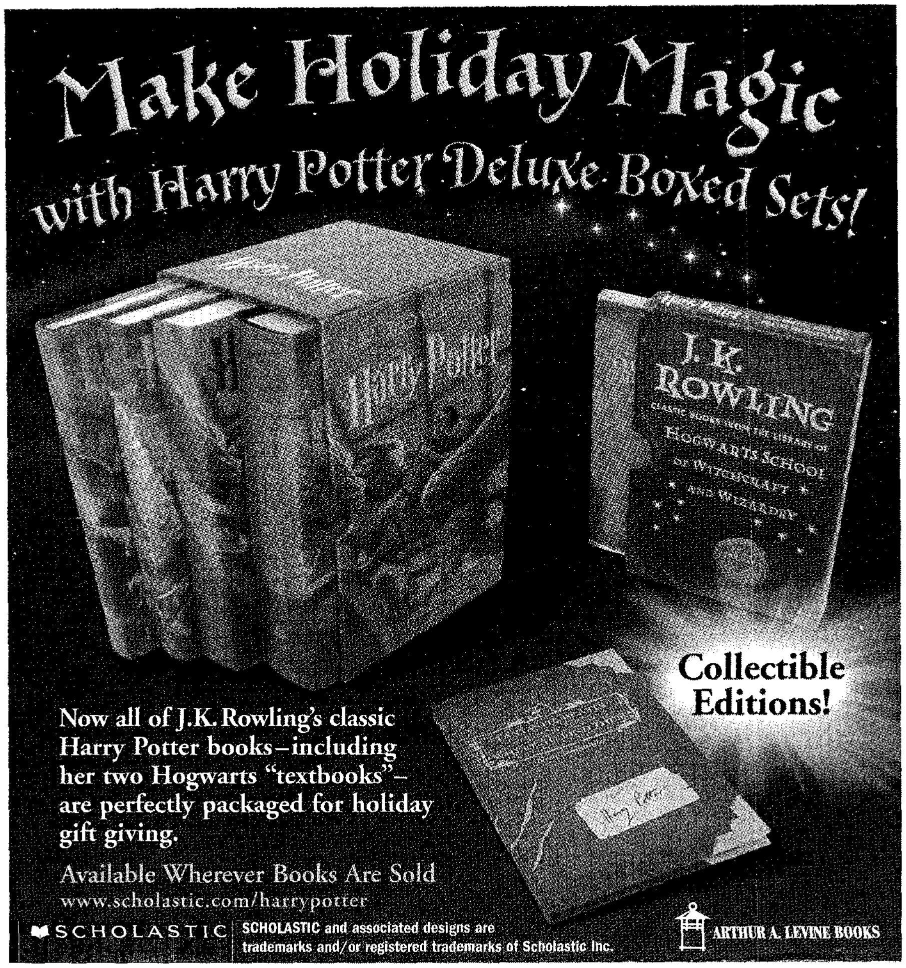
PUBLISHER'S PICK

In **The Elements of Taste** (Little, Brown and Company), four-star chef Gray Kunz teams up with food writer Peter Kaminsky to create a truly revolutionary cookbook that reveals precisely how each flavor fits into the total taste experience. The book also dishes up more than 130 easy-to-prepare recipes, which are conceived according to the interplay of fourteen categories of taste.

The powerful diamond cartel, along with its Byzantine distribution system, has long been cloaked in secrecy. Matthew Hart's **Diamond: A Journey to the Heart of an Obsession** (Walker & Company) probes this most mysterious of industries. Bob Deloria, of Books Inc. in San Francisco, called this one of the best of the year. "The characters are memorable, the stories thrilling, the pleasures delicious."

A mythical land of superheroes and dark alter-egos, the world of comic books has captured the imagination of many generations. Ron Goulart's **Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History** (Collectors Press) relates the colorful story behind the genre. Says Robert Segedy, of McIntyre's Fine Books & Bookends in Pittsboro, North Carolina, "Goulart has done all of us comic book junkies a huge favor with this trip back in time. The beautifully reproduced covers will amaze both the collector and the novice."

Photographer Peter Simon chronicles the defining moments of



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Richard Wilbur

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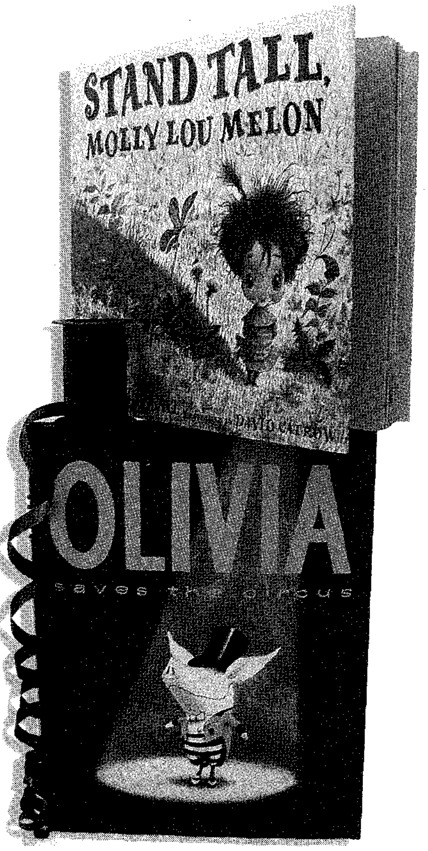
PUBLISHER'S PICK
A beloved fable about ecology, peace, and the interconnectedness of all beings, **Old Turtle** (Scholastic Press) by Douglas Wood, with watercolors by Cheng-Khee Chee, celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. A new commemorative edition includes a CD featuring Wood reading the text. A portion of the book's proceeds will be donated to worldwide peacemaking organizations.

the Boomer generation from the nineteen-sixties to the twenty-noughts in his new book **I and Eye: Pictures Of My Generation** (Bulfinch Press). From the searing protests of the Vietnam War era to quotidian life in hippie communes, to the fish-bowl glamour of the era's rock stars, Robby Bick, of Bunch of Grapes Bookstore in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, calls the book "one of the most visually interesting photography books of recent years."



KID STUFF

They may come in small packages, but children's books open up the enormous world of the imagination and fill it with new friends and colorful adventures.

The porcine phenomenon of last year's "Olivia" is back with **Olivia Saves the Circus** (Atheneum) by Ian Falconer. In an outlandish installment of Show and Tell, Olivia recounts a day of her summer vacation. When all of the circus workers come down with ear infections, the pig *au moment* has to step in to portray everything from the Tattooed Lady to the Queen of the Trapeze. Rose Joseph, of Magic Tree Bookstore in Oak Park, Illinois, prefers this book to the original, noting that "Olivia's irrepressible character is so perfectly portrayed."

Molly Lou Melon may be clumsy, bucktoothed, and have a voice like a bullfrog being squeezed by a boa constrictor, but thanks to encouragement from her grandmother, she is fully capable of disarming the school bully. **Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon** (G.P. Putnam's Sons) by Patty Lovell, with illustrations by David Gatrow, "teaches us how positive self-esteem can be contagious," says Susan Kent, of Treehouse Readers in Kingwood, Texas.

For more information on the complete Book Sense 76 recommendation list, consult with your local independent bookseller, visit www.BookSense.com, or call 1-888-BookSense toll free.

Great Books.
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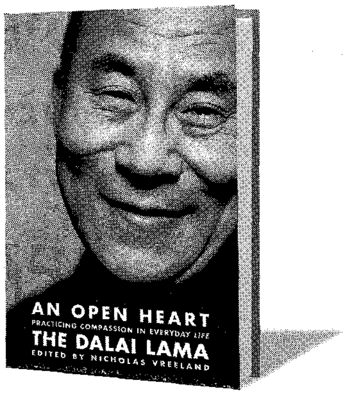
AN OPEN HEART
PRACTICING COMPASSION IN EVERYDAY LIFE
THE DALAI LAMA
EDITED BY NICHOLAS VREELAND

AN OPEN HEART by the Dalai Lama

"Anyone unfamiliar with the basic precepts of Tibetan Buddhism would do well to begin here." —*Men's Journal*

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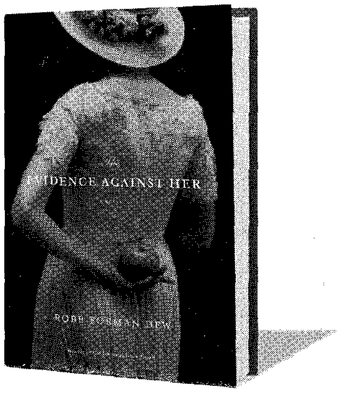
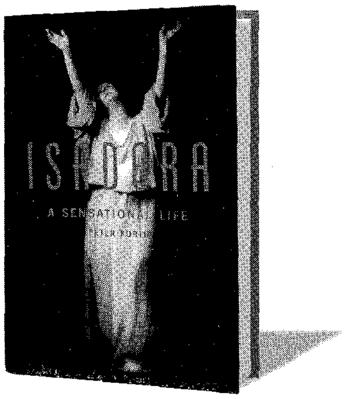


THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HER by Robb Forman Dew

"Dew is an extraordinary purveyor of scenes...her ability to plumb the murky, looming landscape of the mind should be ranked right alongside our other national treasures." —*Chicago Tribune*



ISADORA by Peter Kurth

"Well-detailed...Kurth gamely follows the dancer from one blaze of glory to the next...capably captures Duncan's bohemian, sometimes revolutionary milieu." —*Kirkus Reviews*

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Book Sense 76

INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Top Ten recommendations from the November/December 2001 Book Sense 76, as voted by independent booksellers.

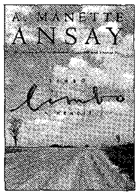
1. LYDIA CASSATT READING THE MORNING PAPER

by Harriet Scott Chessman (Seven Stories Press/Permanent Press, $24) "To admire an artist's work and then to imagine and create a world for the reader is a wonderful form of art itself. I was completely drawn into Lydia's world, and Chessman's language painted a very clear picture in my mind of the Cassatts and the mercurial Degas. So, so beautifully written."—LESLEY KLEISER, MONTGOMERY BOOK CO., CINCINNATI, OH

2. ELLA MINNOW PEA:

A Progressively Lipogrammatic Epistolary Fable,

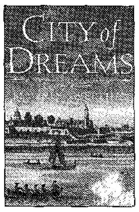
by Mark Dunn (MacAdam/Cage, $22) "A treasure of a novel. Dunn has an incredibly fascinating and clever way of using the English language, with or without all the letters of the alphabet. This witty satire and moving fable is a must read for everyone who loves words...and free speech!"—SUSAN WASSON, BOOKWORKS, ALBUQUERQUE, NM



3. LIMBO:

A Memoir

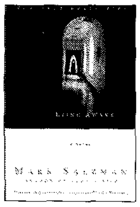
by A. Manette Ansay (William Morrow, $25) "Ansay writes memoir as wonderfully as she writes fiction. Her rural and strictly religious upbringing collides with her great piano talent and with the mysterious illness that has left her partially disabled. It led her to write, and we are so glad she has."—JUDY RODEL, DOWNTOWN BOOKS, HUDSON, WI



4. CITY OF DREAMS:

A Novel of Early Manhattan

by Beverly Swerling (Simon & Schuster, $26.95) "A wonderful epic novel set during Manhattan's early days. Through the saga of two competing families of surgeons and physicians, Swerling brings compelling characters to her telling of a fascinating story. A book I heartily recommend to all!"—DAVE KAVERMAN, LITTLE PROFESSOR, FT. WAYNE, IN

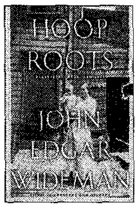


5. LYING AWAKE

by Mark Salzman (Vintage, $12 paper) "A cloistered nun's severe headaches are accompanied by ecstatic visions and bursts of great creativity. When she discovers that this may be a neurological disorder that can be corrected through surgery, she struggles with a decision that tests her faith and her very way of life as a nun. This book is like a beautiful prayer."—STAN HYNDS, NORTHSHIRE BOOKSTORE, MANCHESTER CENTER, VT

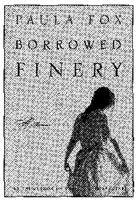
6. FALLING ANGELS

by Tracy Chevalier (Dutton, $24.95) "Chevalier quietly and without fanfare totally pulled me into this story which begins as the characters awake in London at the dawn of the 20th century. This is a remarkable follow-up to GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING."—LAURA CUMMINGS, WHITE BIRCH BOOKS, N. CONWAY, NH Also a Penguin Audio (Audio, 1565115074; CD, 1565115082)



7. HOOP ROOTS

by John Edgar Wideman (Houghton Mifflin, $24) "I found myself out of breath while reading this new memoir in which basketball becomes the purveyor of Wideman's dreams and recollections, his past and his future. His staccato edginess addresses the black predicament so soundly, and resonates like a ball pounding on an urban court. This must be read." —MARGOT LIDDELL, BOOKSMITH, FALMOUTH, MA



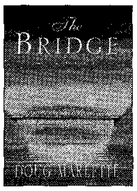
8. BORROWED FINERY:

A Memoir

by Paula Fox (Holt, $23) "Fox's is the story of the unconventional upbringing of an unwanted child repeatedly summoned and abandoned by her restless, artistic parents. Fox became a novelist and children's book author, and her clear, beautiful prose makes this book a standout amid the current group of memoirs."—LAURIE GREER, OLSSON'S BOOKS & RECORDS, BETHESDA, MD

9. ZEN DOG

by Toni Tucker and Judith Adler (Potter, $17) "Not only does this little gift book for dog (or Zen) lovers have wonderfully expressive photographs combined with matching Zen quotations, the introduction alone is worth much tail wagging. All of us who are owned by dogs will fall in love with this one."—NANCY HALE, ANNIE'S BOOK STOP, BRANCHVILLE, NJ



10. THE BRIDGE

by Doug Marlette (HarperCollins, $26) "While this novel is based on the true life of an elderly Southern woman who fought for the right to join unions in the early 1900s, it is also about her large, extended family. It's Marlette's first novel, and one of the best novels to come out of the South in recent years."—RHETT JACKSON, THE HAPPY BOOKSELLER, COLUMBIA, SC

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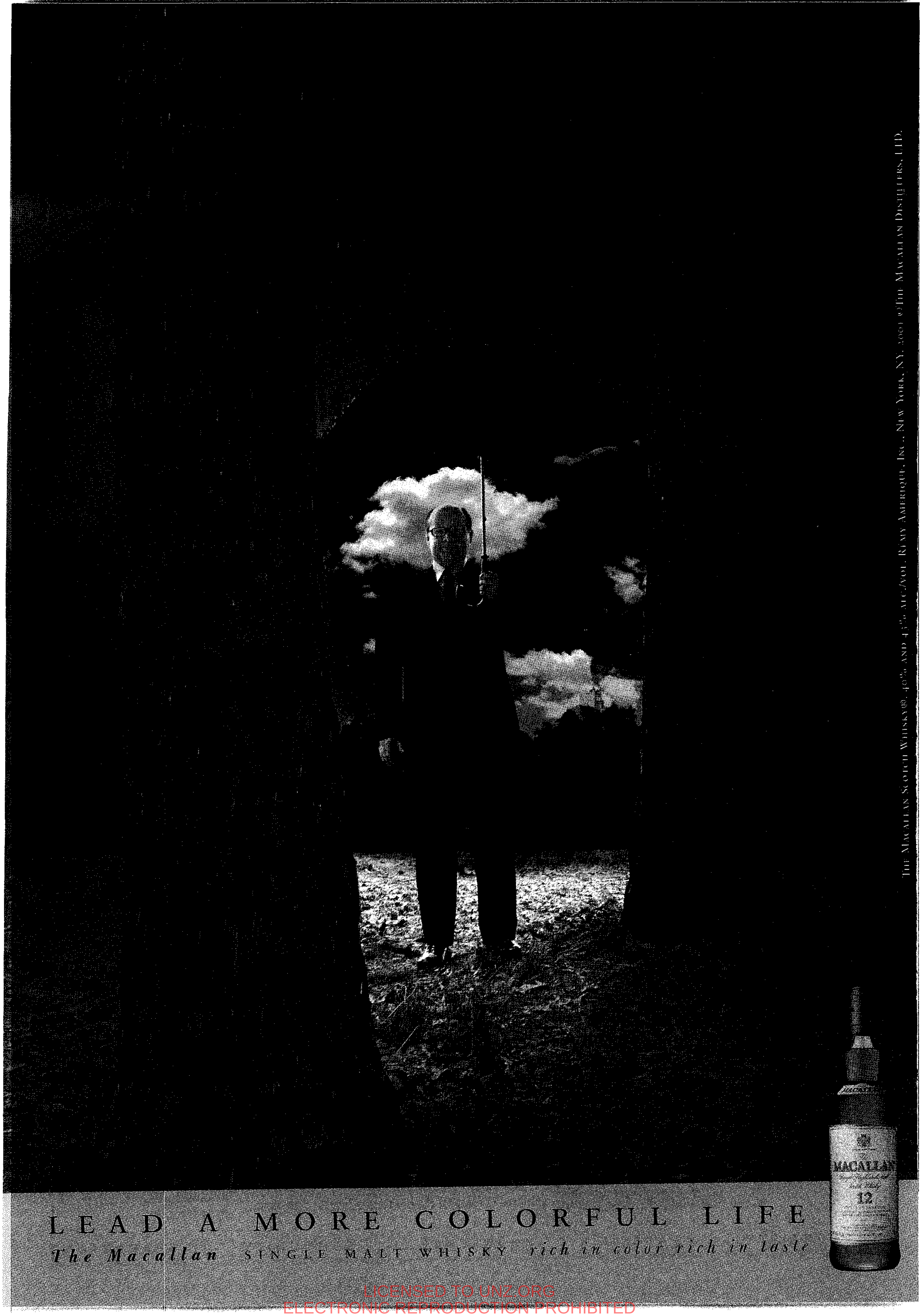
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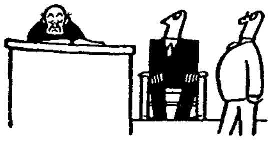
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE WRONG MAN

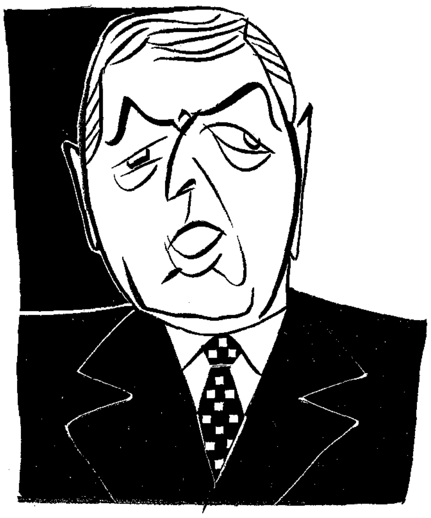


When President Bush—the first one—was running for reëlection, his eldest son served as an informal adviser, enforcer, and factotum. The son's duties in that 1992 campaign included acting as the father's personal liaison to the conservative movement, especially the religious right. By all accounts, he did a serviceable job, but it was too little and too late. George W. Bush drew many lessons from the defeat of George H. W. Bush; one of the most important, the younger man's biographers agree, was that the care and feeding of the right must be attended to early and often.

Eight years later, President-elect Bush served up a plateful of bones to the constituency that, he thought, President Bush had fatally neglected. Among those bones was the femur of a tyrannosaur: the nomination of John Ashcroft as Attorney General. Ashcroft was himself fresh from defeat after a single term in the Senate, where, according to the authoritative *National Journal*, he had tied for first place as the most conservative member. Ashcroft was an advocate of criminalizing abortion, even in cases of rape and incest; he was a promiscuous advocate of amending the Constitution in such areas as school prayer, abortion, and flag-burning; and he was a passionate opponent of what he called "special rights for homosexuals." Almost all Bush's Cabinet choices were approved by overwhelming margins; in Ashcroft's case, despite the Senate's traditional solicitude for its alumni, forty-two votes were recorded against confirmation. Ashcroft, in other words, was picked as a consequence of certain political calculations to play a certain political role. That was then, before the hijacked planes put a rent in the fabric of time. The role Ashcroft finds himself playing now is, like so many other things, suddenly very different.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

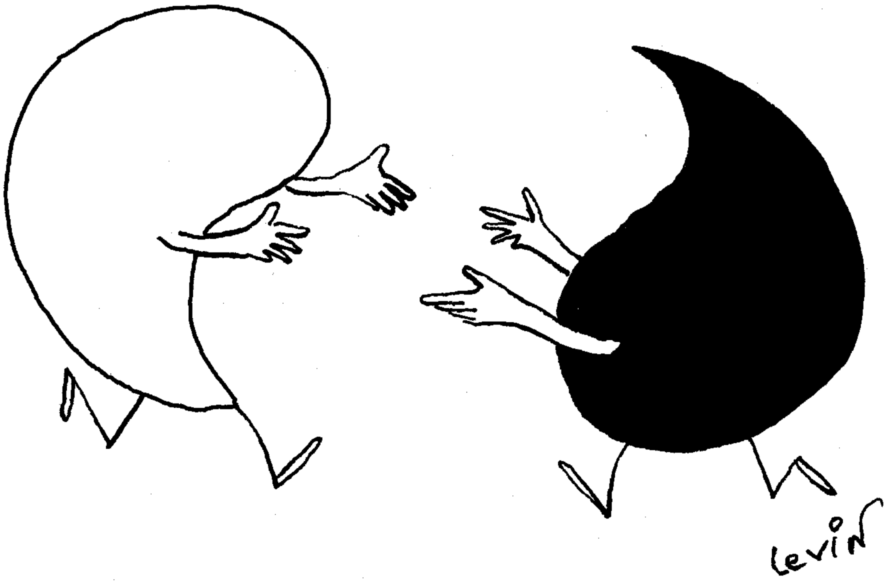
The Administration's handling of the unprecedented emergency that began on September 11th has been, in its broad outlines, balanced and proportionate. The military and diplomatic campaign against terrorism continues to enjoy nearly unanimous public and congressional support. But there has been at least one conspicuous exception to the overall pattern, and the main author of that exception is John Ashcroft. A series of actions taken by the Department of Justice has raised the hackles of an unusual array of critics. The actions include, notably, an administrative order allowing federal authorities to eavesdrop on conversations between prisoners and their lawyers without a warrant; the summoning for questioning of some five thousand students from Islamic countries resident in the United States; the continued detention of hundreds of aliens without explanation; and the establishment of military tribunals to try suspected terrorists. Those raising the alarm have ranged from the Cato Institute, on the right, to the American Civil Liberties Union, on the left, and from conservatives like William Safire and Bob Barr (Bill Clinton's nemesis in the House) to liberals like Anthony Lewis and Patrick Leahy, whose Senate Judiciary Committee will question Ashcroft in open hearings this week.


John Ashcroft

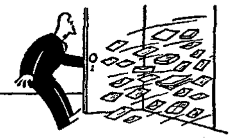
It's still a free country. Bush and Ashcroft, for what it's worth, have done nothing that can compare with the prosecution of thousands of dissenters during the First World War, the detention of a hundred and twenty thousand Japanese-Americans during the Second, or the F.B.I.'s harassment of the Vietnam-era antiwar movement. Nor are any of the Administration's actions without the germ of a rationale. But all have been marked by some combination of overreaching, arbitrariness, and unwisdom. The eavesdropping is a dangerous breach of attorney-client confidentiality and superfluous to boot, since judicial warrants are readily obtainable; the mass questioning is almost surely not worth the cost in ill will and misdirected resources; and the detention of aliens has been so shrouded in unnecessary secrecy that a proper evaluation of it has been impossible. As for military tribunals, they may make sense for certain suspected terrorists captured in, for example, Afghanistan. But within the United States the success of several recent terrorist trials gives the lie to the idea that civilian justice poses unacceptable risks of compromising intelligence sources, endangering judges and jurors, or giving defendants a propaganda forum. Military "commissions"—which lack many of the safeguards of ordinary courts-martial—should be used very sparingly, if at all. Arrest, trial, conviction (by a two-thirds vote), and execution could all take place in secret; in theory, this may already have happened. The establishment of the military tribunals, like the other steps mentioned above, was done by executive fiat, without congressional approval or even consultation. Undeniably, foreign nationals have fewer constitutional rights than do American citizens, and it is foreign nationals who will be most affected by Ashcroft's actions. But the rights the United States is supposed to stand for are not just constitutional. They are human.

In many of the world's democratic countries, an extreme emergency like the one the United States has been facing since September 11th might well prompt the formation of a government of national unity, in which all responsible major parties and groups are represented. Our idiosyncratic political system doesn't work that way. But American Presidents have in the past been flexible enough to broaden their Administrations in times of international crisis. Franklin D. Roosevelt included prominent Republicans in his wartime Cabinet; Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy made similar gestures to the loyal opposition at the height of the Cold War. The result in each case was an appreciable dampening not only of partisan but also of ideological rancor. No one imagines that George W. Bush is about to populate his Cabinet with Democrats. Nor should he. But some diminution of civil liberty is going to be inevitable in the war on terrorism, and the discretion left to the Attorney General, already large, will inevitably grow larger than ever. And, more than ever, the occupant of that office ought to be someone who can be trusted to strike the right balance. There have been such Attorneys General in past Republican Administrations. (Elliot Richardson, under Nixon, and Edward Levi, under Ford, come to mind.) The President frequently says that the war on terrorism will require sacrifice. John Ashcroft is one sacrifice that should be asked of him.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



THE WAR EFFORT
AN E-MAIL BOMBARDIER



Jerry Balsam is a concerned citizen, one who has published seventeen letters to the editor in the *Times*. But Jerry Balsam, mild-mannered hedge-fund analyst, is not nearly as concerned a citizen as his muscular online alter ego, BALSAM, JERRY. BALSAM, JERRY scours the Internet for provocative assessments of terrorism and the war in Afghanistan and E-mails up to ten articles a day to two hundred and three of his closest friends and colleagues, stuffing their mailboxes with briefs from *Foreign Policy*, the Jerusalem *Post*, the *Onion*, and even *Scientific American*.

Prior to September 11th, Balsam pinged out occasional reports to smaller groups of friends who share a special interest in such matters as Jewish studies, tennis, and law. Then the towers fell. One of the two victims Balsam knew was the husband of a former colleague at his firm, Gabriel Capital Group. "His widow, who has two small children, came here to see people, and it was all one could do to look her in the eye," Balsam said one recent evening in his Park Avenue office. A slight man with gray-rimmed glasses, he stared down at his computer keyboard. "I'm a neoliberal, but I'm not looking forward to a trial of Mr. bin Laden. I'm looking forward to seeing his head on a pike."

The first BALSAM, JERRY "World Trade Center" circular appeared on September 25th—a Bloomberg report listing the attacks' victims. Later that day, BALSAM, JERRY followed up with two articles from *Slate*, and the obsession had begun. Like many people, Balsam was allaying his anxieties about terrorism by acting as an amateur war correspondent: spending hours each week roaming the Net during conference calls and studying his downloads later at home. But Balsam went several steps further than most, becoming an amateur publisher and, indeed, an amateur general. Rolling E-mail barrages are the shy person's way of winning hearts and minds. "The armed forces are not drafting forty-four-year-old men to crawl through the caves of Afghanistan, for which I'm grateful," Balsam said. "So this is my small contribution to the war effort.”

Balsam zipped onto the Internet and began demonstrating the mechanics of his daily sift, beginning at the Washington *Post's* home page. “There's Michael Kelly engaged in some criticism of the postwar analysis,” Balsam said. “Looks interesting, so . . .” His fingers flew, and seconds later an E-mail labelled “Kelly” was winging its way to friends from California to Israel. Balsam then whipped through *Slate*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Salon*, and *Arts & Letters Daily*. If an article seems rife with disinformation—such as the notorious canard that the Mossad was behind the attacks—he'll check it out further at snopes.com, a debunking site. Many of Balsam's best and oddest recommendations come to his attention through his fellow Web prowler Meir Dobkin, a neoconservative Brooklynite in the lighting business who camps out at the *Financial Times*' search engine, tapping in words like “rabbi” and “Israel” and “Jew.” “A lot of Dobkin's stuff comes in at two-thirty in the morning,” Balsam said, making clear with a shrug the boundary where obsession ends and mania begins.

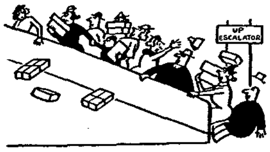
Balsam says that he rarely hears from the people on his W.T.C. list; however, an article from *Salon* that he had just sent out bounced back to him. It had been rejected by the E-mail firewall at a friend's New Jersey law firm. “I wonder what the objectionable word was,” Balsam said, using a search program to see if the article contained the word “shit,” “fuck,” or “ass.” It did not. He read the story more carefully. “I don't think ‘Kalashnikov’ would set it off. Oh, here we go: the author wonders, ‘What about porn in your Islamic state?’ ” Balsam deleted “porn” and sent the article again, successfully. “As far as this firewall is concerned, it doesn't have to be pornographic to be porn, apparently.”

He took a peek at *The Nation's* site: “I'm always nervous they're going to take a Blame America First attitude, or at least a You Must Understand the Root Causes approach. Root causes can be addressed when the current threat is off the table.” Then he flicked through the personal sites of the commentators Andrew Sullivan, Joshua Micah Marshall, and Mickey Kaus. “I clicked on a Kaus hyperlink, ‘Good Kunduz dispatch,’ saw it was from MSNBC, and said the heck with it,” Balsam said. “MSNBC's pages are hard to cut and paste, and their content is very middlebrow.”

The day's hunt netted five lively articles, a typically contrary assortment befitting the BALSAM, JERRY brand. “I don't want to argue a position on the complex questions that lie ahead—I just want people to think them through,” he said. He checked his empty mailbox reflexively. “I'll know it's time to retire the W.T.C. list when the *Times* stops printing the sports section upside down.”

—*Tad Friend*

TOY DEPT.
GIRLS AND DOLLS



Reassuring signs lately—on the streets and in the parks—of little girls dramatically mothering baby dolls in their arms or pushing them in tiny strollers were somewhat diffused by what some little girls were doing in toy stores last week. The brand-new Toys R Us in Times Square—Store No. 1595 in the chain—had, on four levels, a sixty-foot indoor Ferris wheel with toy-themed cars (Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head, Tonka Truck, Pokémon, and eleven others); a five-ton, thirty-four-foot-long animatronic “Jurassic Park” Tyrannosaurus rex; and a four-thousand-square-foot, two-story Barbie Dollhouse. Nearby shelves were stocked with boxes of My Real Life Baby ($59.99)—she sleeps, cries, laughs, and burps. Each box bore the line “Learn what it's like to be a little mommy.” Little girls looked blankly at them.

Across the aisle, a Babyland General Hospital/Cabbage Patch Kids and Babies shop featured a seventeen-foot-high tree and large plastic heads of cabbage in a patch staffed by white-clad multilingual “nurses,” looking as though they were just out of their teens. Each nurse had a toy stethoscope around her neck and a nameplate on her lab coat. A few hopeful, chattering little girls, shepherded by a Spanish-speaking woman, gathered around.

“We do not sell them. These are real babies,” Nurse Michelle said emphatically to the little girls, who looked respectful and paid attention.

“Do they grow?” one of the little girls asked.

“It's a toy,” the tallest of the girls said. “You buy it.”

“You don't *buy* your baby here,” Nurse Michelle said, looking stern. “You adopt. This is the adoption center.”

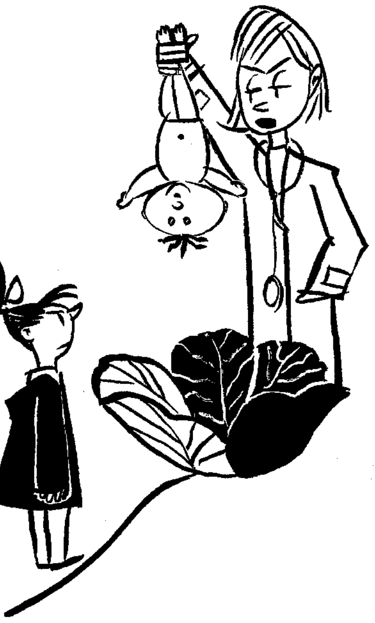
“All our babies are born from a cabbage,” Nurse Jo-Ann said. “This cabbage patch is exclusive to our store here. Mother Cabbage is about to give birth. I'm dilating Mother Cabbage now, and she'll be dilated for ten full cabbage leaves. Push, Mother Cabbage, push!”

Nurse Tracey said, “Mother Cabbage is nervous. Calm her down.”

Everybody around the cabbage patch looked anxious.

“This is creepy,” one of the little girls said. Their shepherd gave a deep sigh.

“Cabbage Patch Kids are about to have their twentieth anniversary, so Head Nurse Linda came all the way from headquarters, in Cleveland, Georgia, to train us in the birthing,” Nurse Jo-Ann said. “I never had to do a C-section, though. I just give the babies T.L.C. in this bottle—it's like an I.V.—and some imagicillin. Push, Mother Cabbage, push!” She reached into a hole among the cabbage leaves and pulled out a naked doll about fourteen inches long.



“It's a boy,” Nurse Tracey said. “Say hello to John Adam.” She gave the doll a spank. “Bunnybees, who fly like bees and hop like bunnies, sprinkle magical crystals on the babies—blue Bunnybees for boys and pink Bunnybees for girls.”

The woman who was with the little girls said, “*Cuanto cuestan los bebés?*”

"Los chiquitos son $64.99," Nurse Michelle said. "The old Mattel Cabbage Patch Babies are $14.99. But these are exclusive Toys R Us Cabbage Patch Babies. When you adopt ours, you get to choose your own name and can change the birth date. Remember, you adopt. Remember, we never sell."

"I don't want it. I want Barbie," one of the little girls said.

"Donde están las cosas de Barbie?" the woman asked. *"En la casa de Barbie?"*

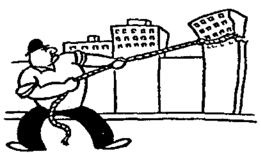
"Barbie! Barbie!" the little girls cried, and they deserted the Cabbage Patch for Barbie's walk-in Dollhouse. At the entrance, a beautiful young woman dressed as a fairy held a wand and, with it, touched the little girls and the Spanish-speaking woman on the shoulder, smiling and murmuring to them. Along with hordes of other little girls and their mothers, they jammed hysterically into the Dollhouse. The air smelled of bubble gum. Barbie was starring in her first movie, "The Nutcracker," with Ken as Prince Eric, Little Sister Kelly as the Snow Fairy, Friend Jenny as the Flower Fairy, and the hell with Tchaikovsky. White "Nutcracker" Barbie had blond hair; black "Nutcracker" Barbie had black hair. Both wore ballet slippers, an organdy dress with sparkles, a golden necklace, and a crown.

The little girls tried on Barbie-brand clothes for Barbie owners—furry or shiny or denim jackets with flowers and sparkles. Their baby-sitter picked up a pink Barbie telephone set. On the box, it read *"Intercomunicadores—¡Hola, soy Barbie!"*

"Do we adopt Barbie, too?" one of the little girls asked. Her guardian answered breathlessly in Spanish: "The pretty fairy touched me with her wand and told me that we would have everything we wanted."

—*Lillian Ross*

DEPT. OF SECOND CHANCES
A PARK AVENUE MAKEOVER



The last thing an architect usually worries about when he renovates a landmark building is the original architect's sensibilities, because the original architect is usually dead. Bartholomew Voorsanger had no such luxury when he was asked, a couple of years ago, to redesign the Asia Society, on Park Avenue. Its architect, Edward Larrabee Barnes, is very much alive. Barnes finished the Asia Society, at the corner of Seventieth Street, in 1981, and even the most charitable critics have tended to consider his eight-story box of red Oklahoma granite one of the less successful pieces of recent museum architecture in New York. The Asia Society building was only eighteen years old when the society decided that it was time to give it a thorough overhaul. Tactfully, Nicholas Platt, the society's president, suggested the other day that the redo was necessary because the society, which is a research and conference center as well as a museum, needed more exhibition space than Barnes had been asked to provide. "It was conceived as a kind of Council of Foreign Relations with a slight Asian slant, but in the meantime we had become a genuinely public institution," he said.

Platt's sense of diplomacy—he is a former United States ambassador to Pakistan—did not extend as far as inviting Barnes, who retired six years ago, to have another try at the building. Instead, Platt hired Voorsanger, the architect who put up a glass atrium at the Morgan Library in 1992, and asked him what he thought he could do to expand the society's galleries and give the building a more welcoming presence. Barnes had designed a tall, flat façade, which had the advantage of blending in with the stolid apartment houses of Park Avenue but was rather dour. Behind the building, he placed a walled garden with a pergola that suited the small scale of the town houses along East Seventieth Street, but did little else. "It was effectively useless," Platt said.

Voorsanger figured that there wasn't too much he could do with the façade, so he decided to tackle the garden. His first idea was to replace Barnes's pergola with a three-story glass-enclosed atrium. The Asia Society's neighbors along Seventieth Street, which is one of the city's most graceful blocks, were not pleased, and they mounted a campaign to persuade the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which has jurisdiction over the project, to reject the plans. "Originally, the neighbors hated the building, then they all wanted to protect it," Voorsanger said. Voorsanger travelled to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Barnes now lives, to show the architect his plans and seek his approval. Not only did he fail to get it but Barnes wrote to the landmarks commission criticizing the project.

"A feng-shui expert said it was great, but Landmarks doesn't go for feng shui," Voorsanger said. When the commission let it be known that it was unhappy with the scheme, Voorsanger tried again with a smaller version. He cut a floor off the atrium and added a few swoops to make his design more fluid. This design appears almost to sway, a soft counterpoint to the solid masonry of Barnes's building. The commission gave him the go-ahead.

Inside, Voorsanger completely redesigned the public areas. He doubled the gallery space, and he made the three lower floors of the building seem more like a museum by connecting them with a gently curving open staircase that has blue laminated glass steps, white steel structural elements, and light birch rails. Voorsanger avoided any obvious and literal Asian elements in the design, but he didn't want it to seem overtly Western, either. "When we found the blue marble for the floor of the garden court, we thought it was from Pakistan, and everybody said great, it's Asian," Voorsanger said. "Then it turned out to be from Brazil."

When the renovated building was nearing completion, Voorsanger invited Barnes down from Cambridge for a tour. He got no immediate response from the architect, and he wasn't sure whether Barnes was still annoyed at having his building tampered with by someone else. A few days later, just before the building reopened, Voorsanger was walking through with a visitor, and Nicholas Platt's secretary handed him an envelope with Barnes's return address. Voorsanger looked at it, shook it once or twice, and made a nervous comment about whether architects have access to anthrax. He didn't open it until he got back to his office, where he found that the envelope simply contained a short handwritten note that read, "Congratulations on the new Asia Society Museum. I regret that I will not be able to come to the opening, but thank you for the offer of a private tour. I may impose on you when we are next in New York."

—*Paul Goldberger*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE MARSHALL PLAN MYTH

With the crumbling of the Taliban, the reconstruction of Afghanistan has leaped to the top of the world's to-do list. Policymakers have summoned a simple idea: a Marshall Plan for the ravaged country. President Bush compared the task to the way "America fed and rebuilt Japan and Germany" after the Second World War. Labour Party leaders in Britain have adopted George C. Marshall as the patron saint of nation-building. And a chorus of pundits is calling for a multibillion-dollar reconstruction program modelled on, yes, the Marshall Plan.

Politicians love to invoke the Marshall Plan as an example of how countries destroyed by war can be rebuilt almost overnight. In the popular imagination, the Marshall Plan transformed the economies of Europe, in just a few years, from ruined shells into vibrant industrial powerhouses. If American aid could rescue war-torn Germany, the thinking goes, it can certainly do the same for Afghanistan.

But the Marshall Plan wasn't what we think it was. It did not single-handedly rebuild Western Europe. By the time Marshall aid started to flow, in the spring of 1948, Western Europe was hardly a wasteland. Most of the region's industrial infrastructure—electrical grids, water systems, roadways, and railways—had already been rebuilt. Trains were carrying almost as much freight as they had carried before the war. Industrial production was rebounding.

The real problem facing Europe in 1948 was fear. People were afraid of runaway inflation and political turmoil and skeptical of the free market. Such trepidation made it hard to get down to business. Farmers were reluctant to bring their crops to market. Investors were reluctant to invest. Consumers were reluctant to spend. The Marshall Plan sought to overcome this by letting Europeans know that they would not be allowed to fail. The historian David Reynolds points out, "Marshall's offer was . . . as much about reassurance as recovery."

In practical terms, the plan pushed European governments to pursue sound economic strategies by giving the United States control over how Marshall aid was spent. To receive Marshall aid, a country had to curb government spending, balance its budget, and dismantle trade quotas and other restrictions on the free market. The dollars themselves were important, of course, because they helped governments fight hunger and poverty without breaking the bank. But, as the economists Brad DeLong and Barry Eichengreen demonstrated in a recent study, the sense of stability that was fostered by strict American oversight made the real difference. By 1949, Europe was on the verge of a period of economic "supergrowth."

The Marshall Plan was a catalyst. But it would not have worked had Europe's fundamental strengths not survived the war intact. Europe had been the center of the industrialized world. It had a history of entrepreneurialism. Its people were highly educated and technologically sophisticated. As Walt Rostow wrote, "Western Europe did not need to be invented; it simply had to be recalled."

Afghanistan, by contrast, needs to be created from whole cloth. There is little in the way of an entrepreneurial tradition (with the exception of opium smuggling). The nation was never industrialized (before the Soviet invasion, its major source of revenue was fruits and nuts). Less than a third of the population can read. There is widespread drought and famine. And the entire country is littered with land mines. Even on the day the Second World War ended, Germany was vastly better off than Afghanistan is today.

That doesn't mean that we should write off Afghanistan. It means only that we should be realistic about what can be accomplished there. Invoking the model of postwar Europe encourages the illusion that transforming Afghanistan will be quick and easy, and that Kabul will soon be the Paris of Central Asia. It won't be. The Marshall Plan myth just insures that in a few years the West will grow frustrated and the Afghans will feel betrayed—a dangerous mix.

Instead of making promises we can't keep, we might consider the recent rehabilitation of Mozambique. In 1992, when a sixteen-year civil war that had left nearly a million dead finally came to an end, Mozambique was perhaps the poorest country in the world. After democratic elections, though, it embarked on a well-considered program of economic development. Following a blueprint laid out and orchestrated by the United Nations, the World Bank, and others, the country settled millions of refugees, improved its roads, distributed seeds and basic tools to farmers, built new schools and health clinics, and set up a new financial system, including the first central bank in its history. It privatized state-owned businesses, promoted special free-trade zones to encourage export industries, and got rid of price controls. In all this, it was helped by steady infusions of foreign aid, debt relief, and technical assistance. The results were impressive. From 1997 to 1999, Mozambique was among the fastest-growing economies in the world.

The reconstruction of Mozambique has already lasted twice as long as the Marshall Plan, and the country is still poor. Yet in the dismal business of Third World economic development Mozambique is about as good as it gets. A Mozambique Plan promises a lot less than a Marshall Plan, but it's a much better cure for what ails Afghanistan. Jump-starting a stalled modern economy is one thing. Building a modern economy from scratch is quite another.

—James Surowiecki

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

LESS THAN ZERO

Why September 11th was good for the Republicans' budget.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

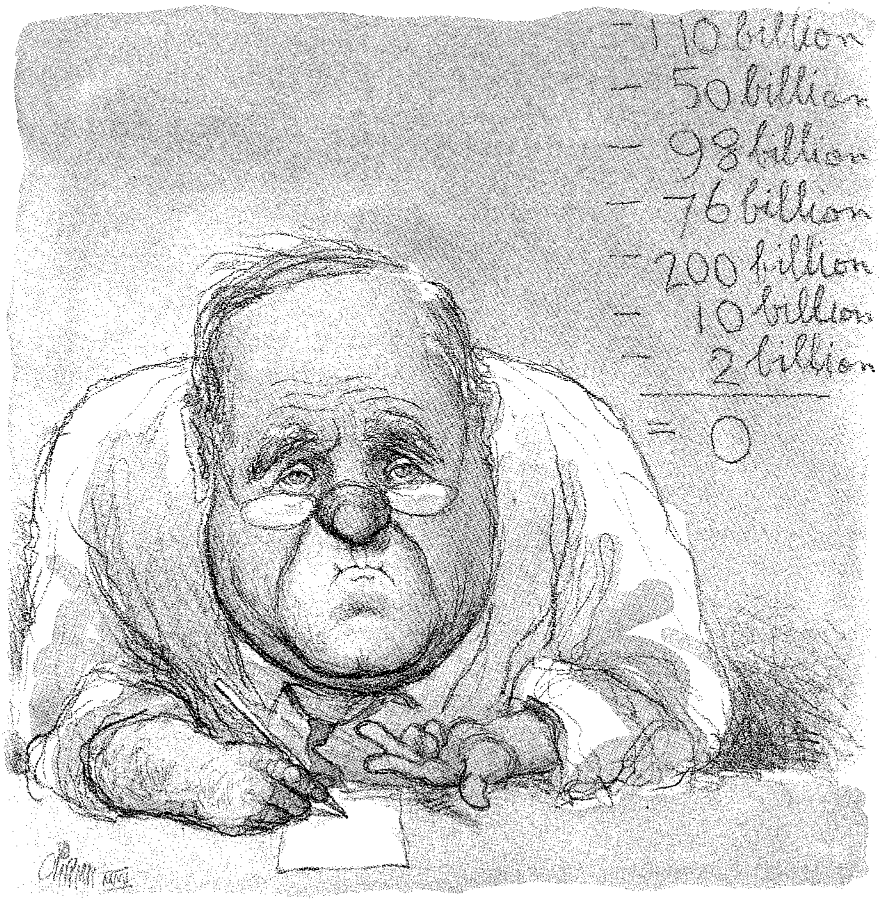
Representative John Spratt, Democrat of South Carolina, comes across as a wielder of limited but deep-seated authority, in the manner of someone who has been headmaster of the same small boarding school for decades. He is in his late fifties, solid, blunt-nosed, clear-eyed. We met one afternoon not long ago in Washington, in the Thomas P. O'Neill House Office Building—a converted hotel near the Capitol which will soon be torn down and replaced with a real office building. Because Spratt's office had been closed for anthrax testing, he was camping out in space ordinarily used by the Democratic staff of the House Budget Committee—an arrangement that worked just fine, since he is the committee's highest-ranking Democrat. It was a typical fall-of-2001 scene in the Capitol complex: long wooden tables had been installed in what was once a sitting room. Aides sat at the tables, the emptied contents of briefcases spread in front of them, conducting the nation's business on cell phones. Stacked against a wall were a lot of big charts mounted on foam board, showing, in primary colors, waves of government surpluses and deficits, rising and falling over grids of strict, thick black lines.

Sitting at one end of a table, Spratt told me his September 11th story. The federal government was set to run a budget surplus, and the big question was how to protect the surplus of the Social Security system from being eaten up by the needs of the rest of the government. The Republican members of the House Budget Committee had one idea about how to do that, which Spratt didn't like, so he had convened the Democratic members, at nine that morning, to come up with a counter-proposal. Then, at ten-thirty, there would be a meeting of the full committee—in Capitol language, a "markup"—where the two sides would go at it.

When Spratt arrived, a television was on, and everyone was watching the World Trade Center burning. A few minutes later, Representative Jim Nussle, Republican of Iowa, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, stuck his head in the room. "The markup is over," Nussle said. "This building is being evacuated. And I just heard a loud boom and saw a cloud of smoke rising over the Potomac." Spratt and his fellow-Democrats left the room, and as soon as they got outside they heard the rumor that another plane was headed for the Capitol dome.

"That seems years ago now," Spratt said, shaking his head. Then he reached into his briefcase and handed me a few sheets of legal paper filled with rows of figures written in a neat, firm hand; they looked like the household accounts of a person who is more organized and less computer-reliant than most of us. He put on a pair of half-glasses and stabbed a number on the first page. "Right there is the budget surplus we began with," he said, giving me a steady, pedagogical, over-the-glasses look. The number was $304 billion for the coming fiscal year. If you protected the surpluses generated by the Social Security and Medicare systems, that still left a surplus of $93 billion.

Now Spratt's finger moved down a few rows, to another number: $176 billion. That was what the government's surplus had shrunk to by August—partly because the economy had started to turn sour, and partly because of the tax cut that President Bush had passed in the spring. He turned to the second page of his figures, which was labelled "Surplus Since September 11." Down a column were arranged a series of subtractions: $80 billion to account for the deep deterioration of the economy; $25 billion in emergency antiterrorism spending; $6 billion to bail out the airlines. By the end of the column, the surplus was down to $52 billion. Then we



Representative John Spratt worries about a return to Reagan-era deficits.

went on to the third page, headed "Likely Further Action." Here was another, longer column of subtractions from the federal Treasury, such as more spending to pay for the war in Afghanistan and homeland defense, and the economic-stimulus package that is now pending in Congress, which Spratt had down as costing $104 billion over the next year. At the end of that column, there was a deficit of $68 billion.

The stimulus package, which is the biggest piece of new legislation with a real chance of passing before Congress goes home for its long holiday vacation, will be the main event in Washington in December. The question of exactly who gets stimulated and how will manifest itself in competitive claim-making on the Treasury, and will be taken as a sign that, with the advent of war, big government is back. This impression will be a misleading one, though. First of all, one shouldn't be so sure that Congress will pass a stimulus bill. And, if it does, the political conversation will have changed fundamentally by virtue of the government's having gone into deficit.

We've all become accustomed to the idea that everything changed on September 11th. Well, what if everything didn't change? What if, instead, we suffered a terrible attack, we retaliated swiftly and effectively, and soon life resumed in a familiar, if higher-security, form? If that turns out to be the case, the war will still have changed American politics substantially. On Labor Day, the big fight between political parties was about whom to trust to protect the Social Security surplus. That argument has simply been blasted out of existence, because now the Social Security surplus has been spent. Instead, the argument will be about how much to spend on special wartime needs—which represents a shift of the basic role of American government in a more Republican direction than seemed possible a few months ago.

A buzzer went off, and Spratt said he had to go over to the House chamber and vote, but if I came with him we could find a place to talk in the Capitol. We strode past armed guards and politicians declaiming to small clusters of reporters on the lawn, then up a flight of stairs and into the Rayburn Room, which is just off the House floor and looks like an old-fashioned men's club—all wood-panelled walls and leather club chairs and fraying rugs. During the anthrax scare, the Rayburn Room functioned as a kind of group office for whichever members of Congress managed to commandeer a part of it. Today, there was a different meeting going on in every seating group—the chancellor of the City University of New York over here, a delegation of Native Americans across the way. Spratt and I sat at a small card table, and he continued his lecture.

PAT OLIPHANT

"You *know* we're going to do something about bioterrorism," he said. "You know we're going to do aviation security. The Department of Defense has yet to send up any supplemental budgets, but we know the defense budget was already headed upward, and it will probably ramp up some more. The basic requirements—protecting tunnels, bridges, airports—all of it has a price tag. It will be substantial and it will change dramatically. We started this year with a five-trillion-dollar surplus over ten years. That made many things possible—a prescription-drug benefit, long-term solutions to the problems of Social Security and Medicare." About three trillion of those five trillion dollars have since vanished. "Nobody has disavowed those things yet, but they'll be harder to achieve now."

The Congressman excused himself to vote, and came back a couple of minutes later, picking up where he had left off. "Every year for eight years, the bottom line got better," he said. "That was unprecedented in American history. Now our expectations are much diminished. At the moment, we really don't have a budget. It was based on a situation that has changed radically. I don't want to say we'll have to have a tax increase, because I'll be impaled by the Republicans. I'm just saying we need a budget."

Another vote. Spratt ducked out and returned. "In the aftermath of nine-eleven," he said, "there was a feeling of bipartisanship that pervaded this place." During this period, a group of congressional barons, Spratt included, had met and agreed upon a set of principles that would govern the crisis round of economic legislation, particularly the economic-stimulus package. They agreed that everything in the stimulus package should be a temporary measure, with a

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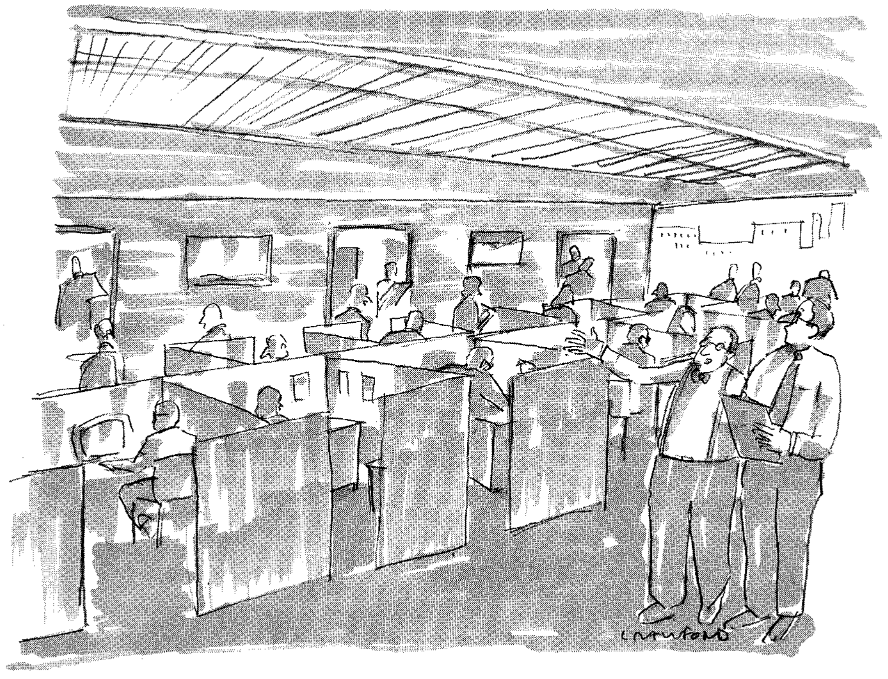


"And the dim fluorescent lighting is meant to emphasize the general absence of hope."

• •

one-year expiration date if possible; that there should be no special favors for specific industries; and that every cost should be offset in savings over time somewhere else. "But then the Ways and Means Committee went off on its own and almost wholly ignored what we had done," he said. Since the Budget Committee, a relatively new institution, was created in part to keep committees like the venerable Ways and Means from giving away the store, this clearly represented to Spratt a realization of a powerful recurring fear.

The House Ways and Means Committee produced a bill, which the House passed in October, that was full of goodies for business and otherwise largely ignored all the principles Spratt had mentioned. Back at the beginning of the year, K Street (shorthand for the community of business lobbyists in Washington), having generously supported the Bush Presidential campaign, approached the Bush Administration and asked for a lot of corporate tax breaks. But the Administration managed to hold K Street at bay; the rumor was that K Street had been told, "This bill will get too much bad publicity if it's loaded up with business tax breaks, so wait—there will be another tax bill later and you'll be taken care of then." The House economic-stimulus package is, essentially, this second tax bill. It would take a big whack out of the government's revenues, not temporarily but permanently—by Spratt's estimate, $274 billion over ten years.

"You need a plan to work from," he said, dolefully. "And for eight years we had one. A lot of people didn't see it. It's not Euclidean geometry. But we had a cap on spending. We had a pay-as-you-go rule, which applied to new programs and to tax cuts. People made fun of it, but it was responsible for our success." With a frown, he said goodbye and scurried back to the House chamber to save what he could.

What Spratt was worried about is a hard-won consensus on the federal budget which took the better part of two decades to build. In 1981, Ronald Reagan, in his first year as President, cut taxes by a lot while increasing defense spending by a lot, and the result was federal deficits of unprecedented magnitude during peacetime. Eliminating these deficits has arguably been the main event in domestic policy ever since. It dominated the rest of the Reagan Administration (thanks more to the efforts of Congress than to those of Reagan himself), the George H. W. Bush Administration, and the Clinton Administration, which finally turned the deficits into surpluses. A whole generation of top-ranking American politicians, including John Spratt, devoted their careers to solving the deficit problem. President George H. W. Bush might have sacrificed his chance for a second term to it, when he agreed in 1990 to a deficit-reducing deal that, by raising taxes, left the conservative wing of his party feeling betrayed. Bill Clinton's conquest of the federal deficit was the great triumph of his Administration, helping to produce the economic boom of the late nineties. Clinton was not content merely to eliminate the deficit; he immediately and deftly moved to lock in a long-term government surplus. In 1998, in his State of the Union message, Clinton introduced the slogan "Save Social Security First," meaning that the surplus generated by Social Security should now be set aside and protected from Republican tax cuts and Democratic spending programs. This idea became the main focus of the strategic maneuvering between the parties for three and a half years, with both trying to look equally devoted to the Social Security surplus. Then came September 11th.

Like everything else in politics, balanced budgets are about ideology and party as well as what they're supposedly about (in this case, accounting). Clinton's budget moves greatly strengthened the Democratic Party—which, as recently as seven years ago, was thought to be dying—by making it look like the political home of sound economics and prosperity. Also, building and maintaining big surpluses in Social Security and Medicare, to prepare for the retirement of the baby-boom generation, encourages middle-class people to think of the federal government as the reliable provider of two extremely desirable things: old-age pensions and health care. That inherently enhances the party of government. Conversely, what has happened to the budget since September 11th is likely to be good news for the Republican Party over the long term. It will take a lot of work for the Democrats to reintroduce the idea that protecting the Social Security surplus must be the sacred first principle of American governance.

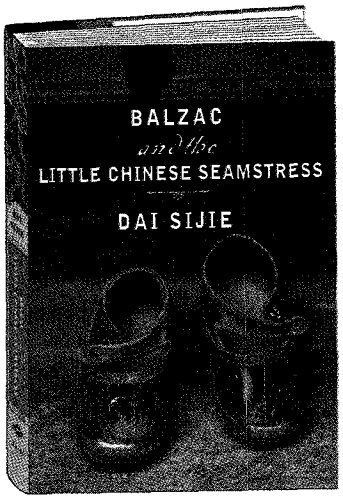
The less politics is centered on Social Security and Medicare, the better it is for the Republicans. Bush's tax cut back in the spring took almost all the slack out of the federal budget, the bad economy took out the rest, and the war has already led Congress to authorize tens of billions in additional defense spending, with more surely to come. The net result will be a government whose clear primary function is national defense, and which can claim it can't afford to take on any new domestic projects, even ones that seemed inevitable before September 11th, like the "patient's bill of rights" and prescription-drug benefits. The basic social compact has become much more Republican than it was when Bush took office.

Last week, Mitchell Daniels, the Bush Administration's budget director, gave a speech predicting that the federal government will be running a deficit for at least the next three years. This was the first White House acknowledgment of the picture that Congressman Spratt had painted for me, and in January official figures confirming the dire predictions will come out. They will shock everyone, and will probably head off proposals both for further tax cuts and for new government programs. Those who want the government to do anything significant that's unrelated to the war know that December will be their last shot. The main place where last shots will be taken is the economic-stimulus bill. The version that the House passed represents the hopes and dreams of business-tax cutters, and there is a similar Republican version pending in the Senate. The Democrats in the Senate, meanwhile, have their own version of the stimulus bill, which is much lighter on business-tax cuts and heavier on hoped-for spending programs, such as increases in unemployment insurance and health benefits.

From the point of view of anybody who wants something from the government, it's unfortunate that life in Washington is returning to normal. The wanters look back enviously at the immediate aftermath of September 11th, when Congress passed several major bills very quickly, without even holding hearings or using the committee system. The big airlines are a particular object of jealousy, because they got such a good deal. By the language of the bailout bill, federal aid goes to airlines, in proportion to their share of the market before September 11th rather than to the business they lost because of the terrorist attacks. The airlines also got protection from individual liability lawsuits, in the form of a federal victim-relief provision that will likely cost the government billions. (At one point, the airlines tried to remove a provision that bars their executives from using the emergency funds to pay for their stock-options packages and other bonuses.)

Now everybody is going to try to use the economic-stimulus package to get the kind of deal the airlines got. Among the industries actively lobbying for emergency assistance are the automobile-rental industry, the insurance industry, the travel-agent industry, the bus industry, the train industry, even, believe it or not, the motion-picture industry. The New York delegation has been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to get more relief funding. Senator Robert Byrd, of West Virginia, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, is trying to introduce an expensive package of additional homeland-security measures (some of which, if past is prologue, may entail spending in his home state).

It's quite possible that all the disagreement and jockeying will mean that there won't be a stimulus package. Over the past month, the economy has begun to look a little less bleak, which makes the need for such a bill seem less pressing. The Administration has become increasingly unwilling to endorse emergency spending except for defense; it is even trying to retreat from President Bush's initial promise of twenty billion dollars for New York. Lobbyists and members of Congress, as they propose additions to the stimulus bill, may be giving themselves the ability to say to interest groups, "Well, I tried," while in the aggregate consigning the bill to the grave. In that case, it will quickly become clear—if the bill passes, it will become clear more gradually—that the war has not ended the long-running American debate about the role of government in government's favor. The war may, in fact, be having the opposite effect, by quietly shrinking the government over the long run. ♦



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NOT SCARED OF HARRY POTTER

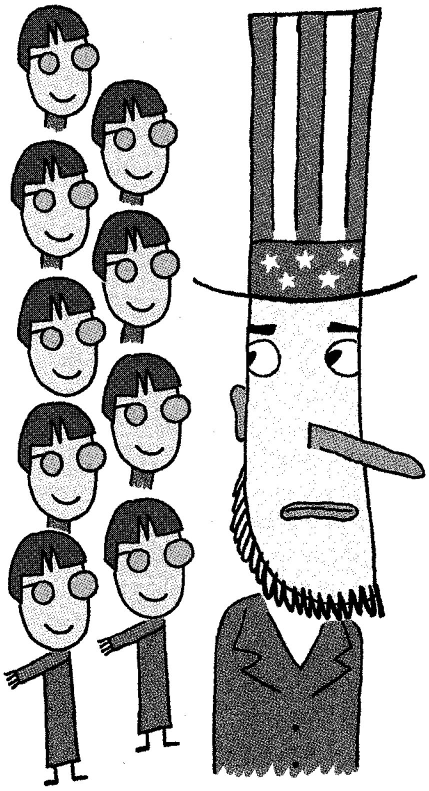
BY BRUCE McCALL

My fellow-Americans, this nation's initial feelings of helplessness and vulnerability have transitioned into calm resolve, and calm resolve has become fighting spirit. Ordinary folks across this great land of ours are ready to do whatever must be done to gird themselves and their loved ones against the insidious and lavishly financed organization led by Harry Potter.

I think of those folks on New York City's Upper East Side, patrolling the streets and pantsing every blazer-and-gray-flannel-clad prep schooler they encounter. In towns and villages all over the Northeast as I speak, the local citizenry is mounting round-the-clock watches on English-style boarding schools, on the lookout for hot-cross-bun smugglers. I have just personally met with the head of homeland security on his plans to root out all bespectacled, preadolescent schoolboys with silly little caps and plummy English accents, wherever in this great land they may be, and send them back to England.

Tonight, I call on all Americans to keep faith that this nation is more than a match for a cute little British twit with an overactive imagination. America has been down this road before. We've been blitzed and merchandised and saturated to the edges of human tolerance by ruthless folks who would turn us into pathetic automatons. But, time and again, after everything they could throw at us, we bend but never break. And it is *we* who are still here. And it is the Smurfs and the Cabbage Patch Kids and the Teletubbies and the Pokémons who have landed in history's attic trunk.

Now, folks are saying that Harry Potter is of English extraction. That pasty complexion and all. But, my fellow-Americans, this is not—and it should be emphasized for all the world to hear—a fight against the English. I call tonight for your tolerance. Yes, the English are different from us. Perhaps you wouldn't choose to eat their food or patronize their dentists. But the vast majority of English men and women are modest, sensible folks who wish only to garden, to take their tea-type beverages, and to tend their royal-scandal scrapbooks. What Harry Potter stands for is not England but a bizarre fantasy of England, long ago dismissed and forgotten by all but a handful of obsessed, incurable, diehard romantics who are dedicated to imposing their obsolete fantasy on the rest of the world. At any cost.



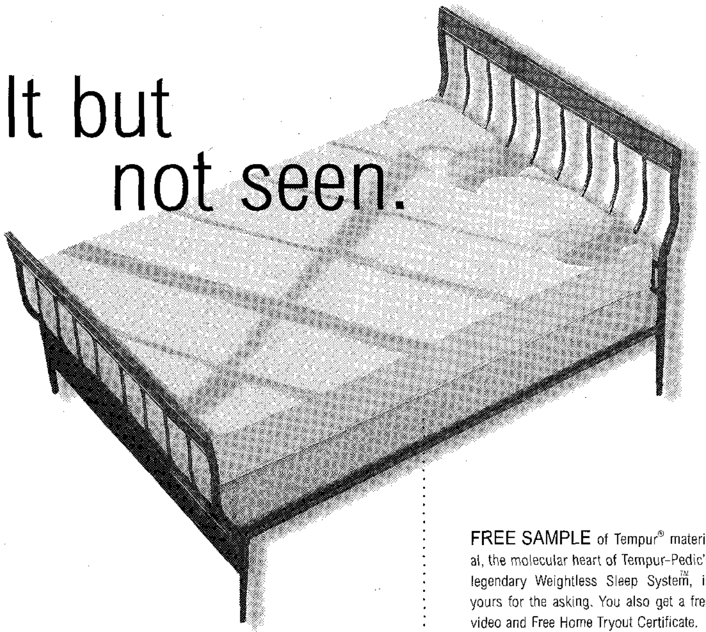
PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

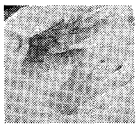
My fellow-Americans, let us make no mistake. If Harry Potter and his well-organized movement should succeed, the America we know and love would be thrust back generations in time to a nightmarish nineteenth-century world of caning and fagging and the love that dares not speak its name. I've read "Tom Brown's School Days" and I know: this is not an American-type world. A world of tuckshops and chapels and snobby private schools teaching ancient Greek is not the American-type way. Any more than a world of witches and sorcerers and weird paranormal events is the American-type way.

But Harry Potter wants to make it the American way. And Harry Potter has made it abundantly clear that in the immediate days and weeks to come he plans to strike with everything he has. Ours will be a nation under siege, faced with a nationwide rollout backed by a billion-dollar campaign that will leave hardly a village or town untouched. You will be confronted at every turn by Harry Potter this and Harry Potter that. During this period, avoid TV and newspaper advertising and AOL Time Warner. Boycott the local multiplex; if you must see a movie, rent a video.

As always, it is our children who will be the most vulnerable. Harry Potter has made no secret of his intention to zero in on our young. It may become necessary to lock them in their rooms or tie them to a chair until Harry Potter and everything he stands for, everything he sells, finally passes. For their sake, and for the sake of the not-British life style we freely chose.

The world we live in will always have its Harry Potters and their well-trained legions of promoters and advance men and flacks, bent on insinuating one or another sugar-coated credo into the very fabric of our society for their own selfish ends. Indeed, as the old folks who lived through the times of "Mary Poppins" can attest, such plots are as old as entertainment itself. Harry Potter thinks he's so smart, but we'll see who's the smart one. Thank you, and God bless America. ♦





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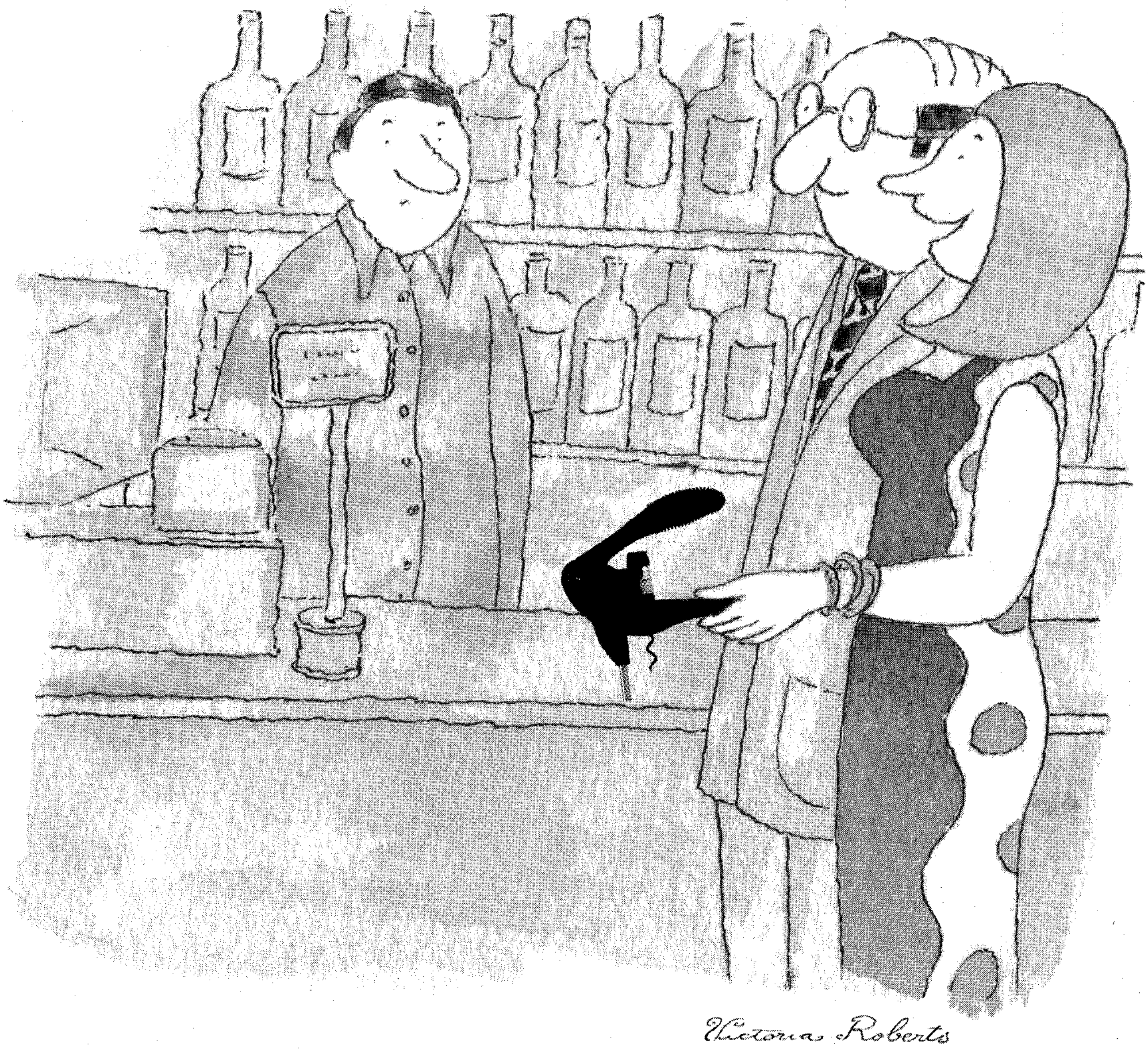

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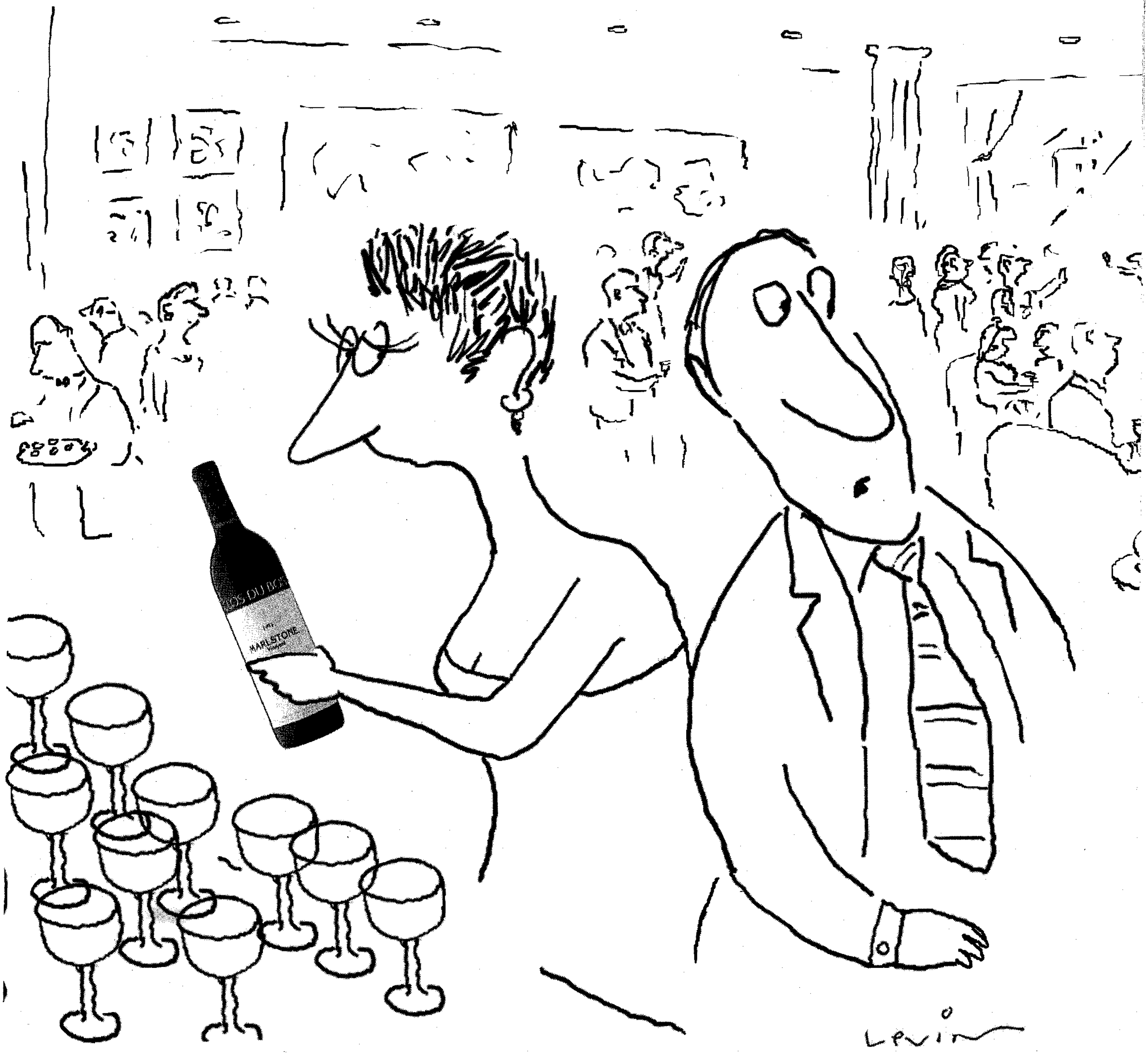
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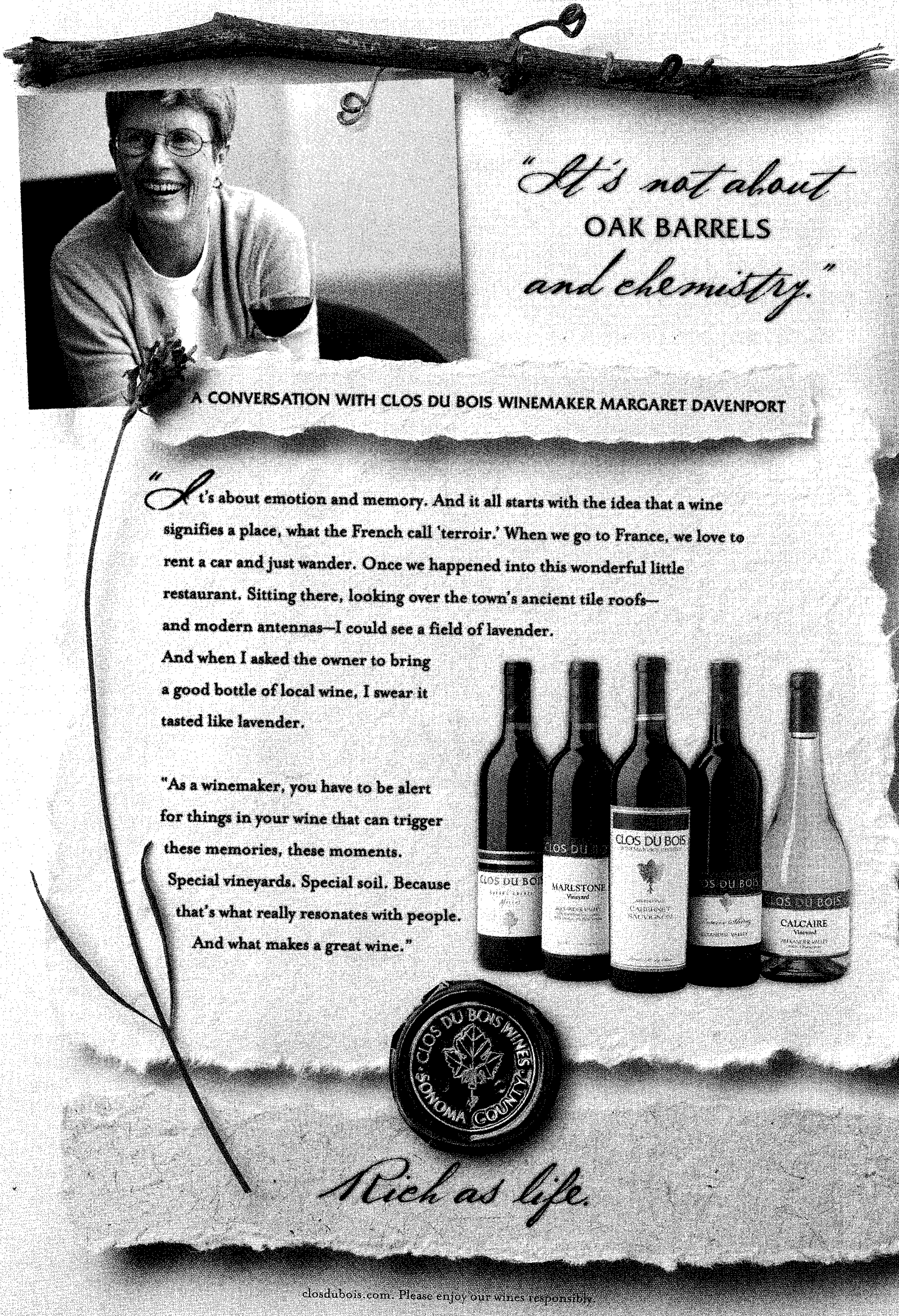
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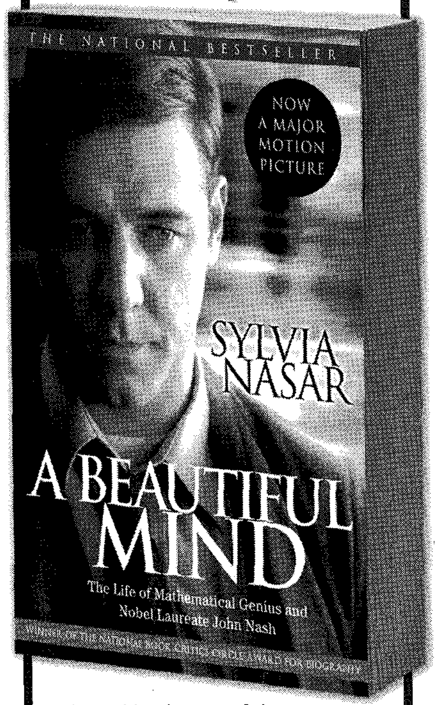
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ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

BATTLE STATIONS

How long will the networks stick with the news?

BY KEN AULETTA

Like so much else, television news changed on the morning of September 11th. Six weeks later, as Aaron Brown, CNN's new anchorman, shifted from a Pentagon briefing to the ruins of the World Trade Center and then to a dissection of the latest anthrax scare, a familiar figure appeared in a box in the right half of the screen: O. J. Simpson on the witness stand. He was testifying in a Florida court, accused of road rage. Brown peered earnestly into the camera and said of the latest Simpson travail, "It is inconceivable to me that seven weeks ago, or six weeks ago, this would not have been carried live." It wasn't now, he said, because "it doesn't matter a whole lot. And here's why it doesn't." The screen filled with rescue workers pulling a body from the rubble of the World Trade towers.

Before September 11th, the evening news, to say nothing of the morning programs and the magazine shows, paid scant attention to foreign news. Instead, the networks filled the air with "weather events," Viagra breakthroughs, reports on various ailments, the murder of Jon Benet Ramsey, the trials of O.J., the death of Princess Diana, the sagas of Monica and Chandra. The networks delivered the headlines of the day, and the dismissive characterization once applied to local television news—"If it bleeds, it leads"—increasingly applied to network news as well. Stories that once might have been noted in passing, if at all, on the half-hour nightly newscasts were now reported endlessly on the nine-o'clock and ten-o'clock magazine shows, which long ago displaced documentaries.

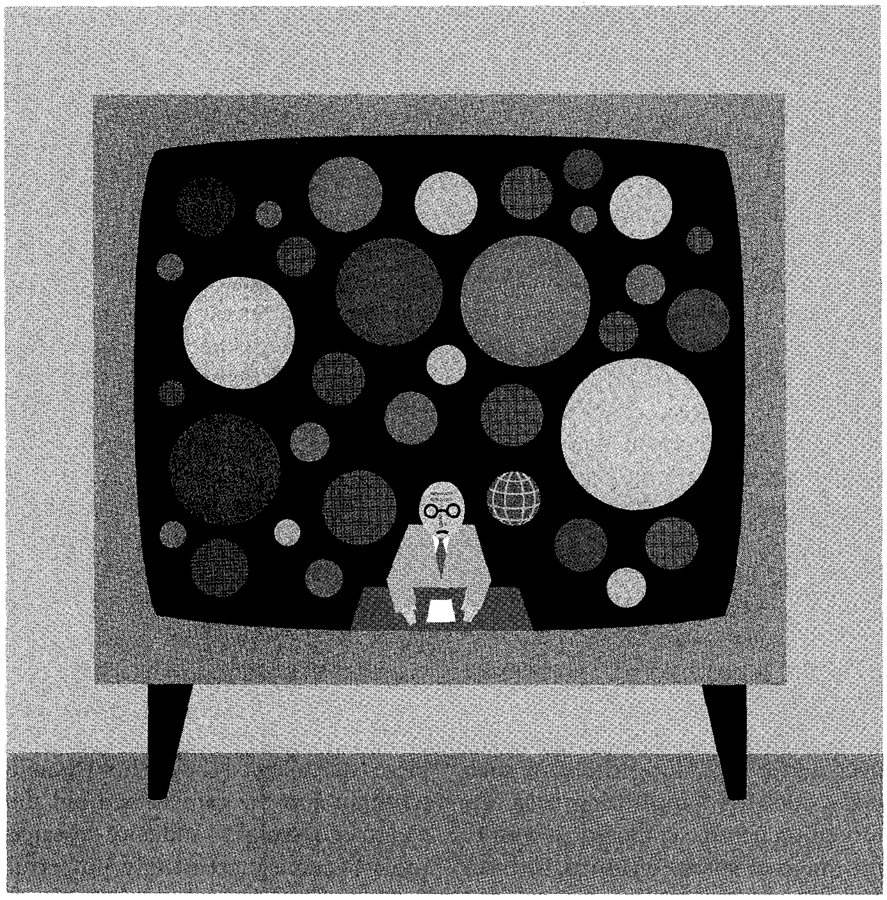
After September 11th, journalists who had grown accustomed to feeling slightly embarrassed by what they did for a living began to look at their jobs with a renewed sense of pride. Even their bosses, who had slashed budgets and trivialized the news in the name of higher ratings and sound business practice, seemed like earnest preachers spreading the gospel of serious journalism. "Over the past ten weeks, we've been reminded why we do what we do," Mel Karmazin, who is the president and C.O.O. of Viacom, the parent company of CBS, said a few weeks ago. Karmazin was speaking at a lunch given in his honor by the Center for Communication, at the Plaza Hotel. He has a fearsome reputation, based in no small part on the demands he makes of his employees. When an executive on the sales force is exhausted and claims that, in the midst of a recession, he cannot sell more ads, Karmazin has been known to reply, "I haven't heard of anyone having a heart attack yet!" But now, at the Plaza, Karmazin aligned himself with a different set of standards. He invoked Edward R. Murrow and quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., on character. Karmazin said, "We want it said of us that when it mattered most we measured up." His peers at NBC, ABC, Fox, and CNN in the audience rose and applauded—both for Karmazin and, it seemed, themselves.

And yet by mid-November news ratings were slipping. Anxiety has spread at the networks as journalists worry that their born-again bosses will start leaning on them to cut costs and produce more fluff. Is the revival of serious news and foreign reporting going to vanish as quickly as it occurred?

"I'm probably the only person in the world who has watched every network newscast since 1988," Andrew Tyndall says. Tyndall produces the Tyndall Report, an analysis of what appears each night on the three network news broadcasts. In 1988, he calculates, the networks generated about two thousand minutes of international news each. Since then, foreign-news coverage—with a few exceptions, such as the Gulf War, in 1991—has plunged. Last year, ABC and CBS offered roughly twelve hundred minutes of international news each, and NBC, the ratings leader, provided about eleven hundred. All three networks have slashed their foreign bureaus and correspondents during the last decade, and before September 11th only about nine per cent of an average nineteen-minute-long broadcast was devoted to foreign news.

Tyndall's methodology can be disputed. For example, when a report on terrorism comes out of Washington, Neal Shapiro, the president of NBC News, argues, "it may count as a Washington story," not as an international story. But neither Shapiro nor his counterparts at ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, and MSNBC dispute Tyndall's conclusion about the over-all trend. Asked about this summer's "news"—the Congressman and the Missing Intern—NBC's president, Andrew Lack, said, "Are there things we should have done differently? Yes. I don't want to be defensive about that. That's a fair criticism. But I am pretty proud of our work. For some people, dwelling on child care is a 'soft news' story—frivolous. As opposed to what Arafat said to Madeleine Albright as she passed through the West Bank!" But he added, "Do I wish that we had spent a little more time probing around corners in the Middle East? Absolutely."

CBS, which once referred to itself as "the Tiffany network," and in June of 1981 replaced its prime-time programming with a brilliant, week-long five-part documentary, "The Defense of the United States," was covering Asia with a single correspondent, based in Tokyo, and the rest of the non-North American world with seven correspondents. Fox News, which has been less reliant on original reporting than on opinion, had only four overseas correspondents. "We basically sent hit teams overseas from out of here," Roger Ailes, the chairman of Fox News, said. CNN had about the same number of overseas bureaus—thirty—as the five other networks combined. But when Walter Isaacson, the former managing editor of *Time*, was appointed CNN's chairman and C.E.O., last July, to revive a tired-looking network, there was talk about moving more toward the raucous formula of Fox, which was climbing in the ratings. At *Time*, circulation rose as Isaacson shifted the balance of the magazine's covers and content away from traditional politics and foreign news. At CNN, he led discussions about cutting foreign correspondents and changing the emphasis of the network's non-crisis coverage. There were also talks about creating a less serious morning show to try to win younger viewers. Isaacson acknowledges, "I was pushing for more technology and life-style reporting." There was even talk of hiring the popular right-wing radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh.



Foreign news dominated after September 11th, but ratings fell in November.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

With some notable exceptions—the *Times*, for example, maintains twenty-six bureaus overseas; the Washington *Post* has twenty-two—many newspapers and news magazines also have cut back on resources devoted to foreign news. As early as 1992, only twenty-five of the top hundred American newspapers had at least one full-time overseas correspondent, according to "International News & Foreign Correspondents," a book by Stephen Hess, of the Brookings Institution. Before accepting a recent buyout offer, *Time's* Paris bureau chief, Tom Sanction, told me of his frustration with the magazine, which had "reduced international coverage to periodic stories on the Middle East and Russia, unavoidable breaking news like the Kosovo war, and occasional touchy-feely features on AIDS in Africa, et cetera."

Still, the sharpest change was in television. For a man rewarded with, reportedly, a seven-million-dollar salary, Dan Rather, the CBS anchor, betrays deep anger. At his office one afternoon, he told me that he blames warped values for the drop in international-news coverage—"the Hollywoodization and 'frivolization' of the news"—and he blames the networks, including his own: "Entertainment values began to overwhelm news values." Rather recalled that, during debates within CBS over what stories to feature on the nightly news, some executives would say, "Don't do two and a half minutes on the crushing of dissent in China. Do it on how to prevent snoring. 'If snoring is a big problem, here's what you can do about it.' " CBS's producers were driven by the conviction, Rather said, that in order to catch NBC in the ratings they needed to create "a modern broadcast," which meant more "news-you-can-use." Of course, Rather

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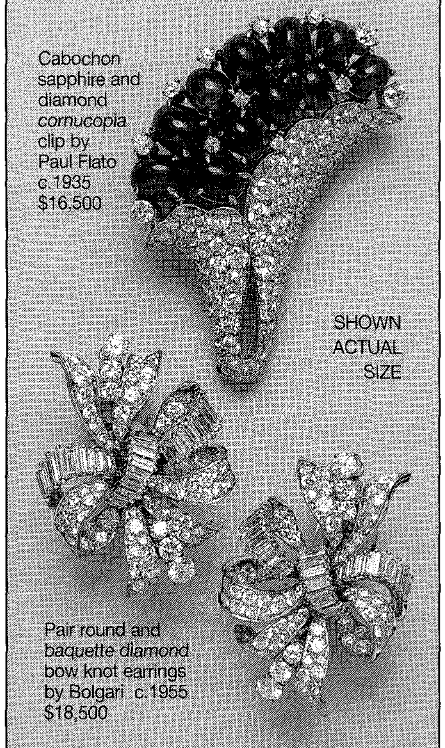

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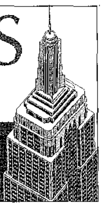


disdained—but nevertheless delivered—the news about snoring.

Of ABC's eight overseas correspondents before September 11th, five were in London and the others were in Jerusalem, Hong Kong, and Nairobi. Earlier this year, to save money, ABC forced out Sheila MacVicar, a correspondent with extensive experience. (She was then hired by CNN.) Costs sometimes also determine whether a network will cover an important story with its own people. James Wooten, ABC's senior correspondent based in London, recalls that if he wanted to go to Africa he would be told, "We're not going to spend forty thousand dollars on that story." The budget for sending a team to Africa would include airfare for a correspondent, a producer, a cameraman, a sound technician, and perhaps even an editor, if the piece was to be cut and fed to the network from the field; steep charges to cover transporting equipment that was over the plane's weight limit per passenger; the daily cost for a fixer on the ground to translate and arrange transportation; hotels, meals, phones, travel. Networks increasingly came to the conclusion that it was often far less expensive to "cover" a story by buying footage from a service like ITN and having a correspondent in London or Washington supply a voice-over narration. Along the way, such techniques for transmitting basic information became confused, at least in the minds of some executives, with actual reporting.

Even CNN, with its enormous foreign staff, was giving less airtime to its overseas bureaus and was imitating the cheaper-to-produce shout-fests on Fox and MSNBC. During the week of July 16th, Larry King devoted five straight nights to the Chandra Levy case; Greta van Susteren's legal program, "The Point," featured it on four of five nights; and "Crossfire" featured it on three of five nights. Many of the newscasts also led with the names Levy and Condit. In August, I asked Gerald Levin, the C.E.O. of CNN's parent corporation, AOL Time Warner, how he squared the ubiquitous Condit coverage with his frequent declarations of loyalty to high-minded journalism. "The reason I don't have a problem with that—obviously, I'm not the news editor—is that it's a story about character," he replied. "It's not a tabloid story. It's about the character of the people who are running our government."

News executives generally offer three explanations for their decisions. First, some just deny the obvious. "The premise that we had been underplaying international news is questionable," Andrew Heyward, the president of CBS News, told me. Heyward pulled out a memorandum listing the many news stories from overseas shown on the evening news and insisted that between twenty and twenty-five per cent of the stories on CBS's most successful magazine shows, "60 Minutes" and "60 Minutes II," are foreign stories. Programs such as "60 Minutes" and ABC's "Nightline" are, however, the exceptions.

Second, they blame the viewers. According to Peter Jennings, the ABC anchor, network officials "came to the dangerous conclusion that Americans are not interested in the rest of the world." Terrified that the audience for news was dwindling, executives began to act like carnival barkers, desperately waving their arms at fickle viewers, begging them to please visit their tent. They packaged news programs like entertainment shows, with music (either dramatic or sentimental) and feel-good end pieces that allowed the anchor to smile wistfully into the camera and bid the country good night. Audience-research tools became increasingly powerful weapons. The networks have contracts with the Nielsen ratings service to provide minute-by-minute audience measurements of programming, including news, which allows them to get accurate profiles of which stories and on-air personalities the public prefers. Aaron Brown, of CNN, remembers talking with Neal Shapiro, the president of NBC News, at a wedding, and Shapiro telling him that when NBC's "Dateline" offered an international story the ratings plunged minute by minute. "His lesson was that if people don't watch it we won't put it on," Brown says. Shapiro acknowledged to me that there was such polling, but he did not recall the exchange with Brown. "People generally have found it easier connecting to stories about them and their lives," Shapiro conceded.

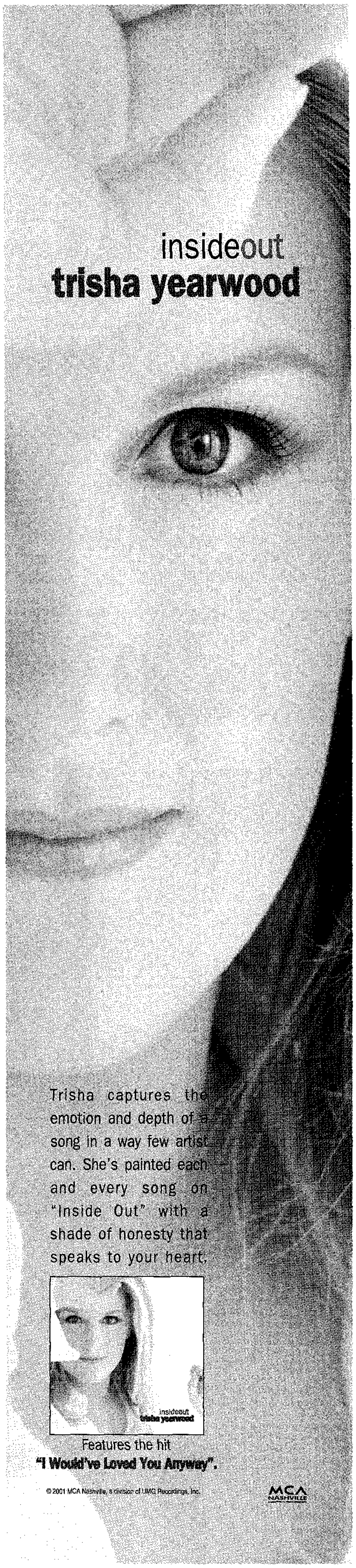
The third explanation is the confluence of specific events and public officials. With the Cold War over, the Clinton Administration declared its intention to focus almost wholly on domestic issues, particularly the economy. Tom Brokaw, the NBC anchor, recalls that in the 2000 Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates the word "terrorism" appeared just twice, both times in passing.

There is some truth to all these explanations, and to the claim that technology has created so many new sources of news that, as Brokaw says, "by the time we come on, at the end of the day, news has been broken into so many different components, and we have to find news that is interesting to the audience and helpful to them." But finding news that is "interesting" and "helpful" speaks mainly of ratings, and not of the higher purpose of journalism. International news is undeniably expensive to collect, and the ratings can be low, with correspondingly low advertising revenues: advertisers are not particularly eager to place their products next to programming about war and other vexing subjects of foreign reporting.

All this seemed to matter less when NBC, CBS, and ABC monopolized ninety per cent of the television audience and the networks were run by owner-managers who were under intense pressure from the government to provide news as a public service. Today, in the age of cable and satellites, ratings are half what they were; what's more, the government has muted its demands that networks serve the public interest. The networks are owned by enormous media conglomerates whose primary profits and values derive from the entertainment business. "The networks went through change when they went from being just networks to becoming part of larger corporations," Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS, told me. "The news division, for what was spent, was bringing less return than other areas of the company."

The executives say that news divisions no longer command the attention and the priority they once did. "You have to decode people as our government wants to decode Osama bin Laden," Danny Schechter, a former ABC and CNN producer and the co-founder of Globalvision, an independent production company, says. "When TV executives say, 'The public doesn't care about this,' they are really saying, 'I don't care about this.' " David Westin, the president of ABC News, insists that he does care about international coverage. So why didn't he do more of it? "It's possible we lost sight of that in a period of relatively fallow news and celebrities," Westin says. "What we do is always try to be on the leading edge of the American interest. Not simply pandering or responding to what they want. But, on the other hand, not being too far out front. There's always a tension there. If

"Damn it, Franklin—when will you learn to delegate."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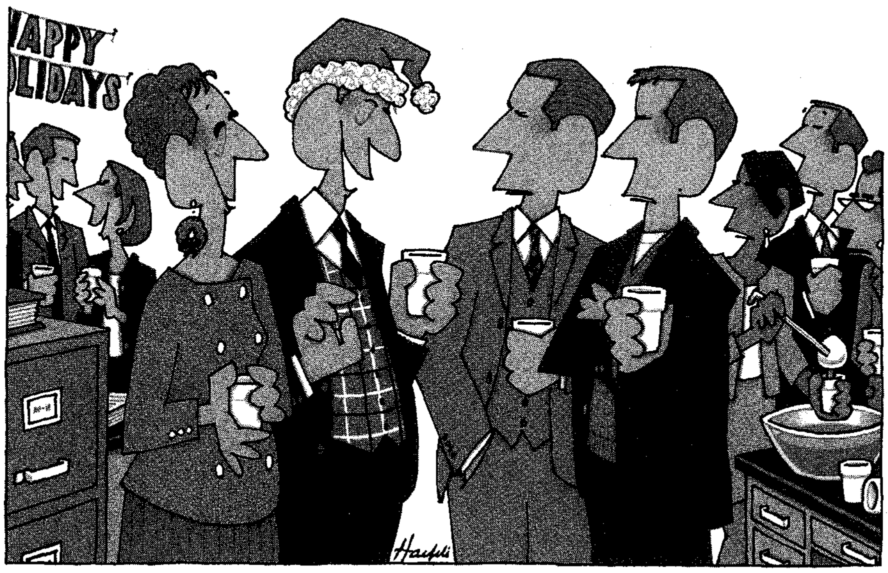

"And you must be the domestic partner we refused to extend spousal benefits to."

you don't care about the size of your audience, you're not in the news business. You're writing a diary."

Andrew Lack was the president of NBC News for eight years, and near the end of his stint, he says, he would "complain all the time" to Tom Brokaw and others that his tenure spanned Presidential elections and the war in Kosovo but never a really "big story." His "big" stories were the tabloid narratives: O.J., Diana, Monica, Condit. Like other news executives, he aggressively, and sometimes mindlessly, pursued these stories. That all changed, of course, when the planes crashed into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. The networks suspended their regular programming and substituted news for the first ninety-plus hours of this new war, exceeding the continuous airtime they had devoted to the assassination of John F. Kennedy or to the start of Operation Desert Storm.

The experience of covering the war on terrorism, with its various tributaries at home and abroad, has reignited a professional pride that had been, for numerous journalists, badly diminished or lost. "I can't tell you how many people at the networks used to call us and say they wanted to marry money and meaning," Danny Schechter, of Globalvision, says. Because of the light news and the hyped "crises" they often chased, he says, "they hated themselves."

Few moments have demonstrated the sudden prestige of the serious journalist and the eclipse of the bogus better than an improvised Thanksgiving lunch for forty foreign correspondents in Jalalabad. Geraldo Rivera, a tabloid warrior who jumped from CNBC to Fox, crashed the feast just as the reporters were sitting down to eat a turkey that they'd found in the market, one participant recalled. The guests ignored Rivera, and his crew had to pull up an extra table for their star.

In contrast, the anchormen, the butt of parody on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and in "Broadcast News," have been a steadying presence. It had always been easy to mock them as pompous, self-conscious actors who knew just how to tilt their heads to indicate concern, how to raise an eyebrow to convey empathy or surprise or doubt. But their real skills, and their experience in the field, now came into play. Hour after hour, they orchestrated a stream of reports from around the country and around the world; they quizzed foreign leaders and ordinary people; they ad-libbed about a complex, unfolding tragedy and placed stories in perspective by relating them to other war zones and places they'd visited; they reminded viewers of what was known and what was not—all the while dealing with producers murmuring into their earpieces. At CNN, there were two

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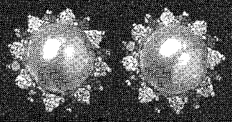

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new anchors, Paula Zahn, who left Fox to lead the morning show, and Aaron Brown, the lead anchor, whose worried, plainspoken style is a counterpoint to the self-assurance of Jennings, Rather, and Brokaw. "I know people come to television at times like this in part to get information, and in part to be part of a community and to be connected to a story in a different way," Brown said. "They want to know things are O.K." And yet, on a bad day, Brown is just as likely to tell them that things are a tragic, confusing mess.

In the wake of September 11th, television news divisions were working with budgets that had been imposed with no such epochal story in mind. Unlike CNN, with its vast international apparatus, the other networks had to rush to send depleted cadres of correspondents first to Pakistan and then to Afghanistan, leaving them short-handed on other stories: the antiterrorism effort in Europe, the fissures in the NATO alliance, Turkey's decision to offer troops to battle fellow-Muslims in Afghanistan. "I don't feel too much was missed," Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS, said, but that view is not widely shared at his network, or at others.

Nevertheless, perhaps for the first time since the early eighties, corporate bosses stopped complaining about "waste." The additional cost of covering this war at home and in Afghanistan, according to Andrew Lack, will be about fifty million dollars a year. Each network news division spends roughly four to five hundred million dollars, and the war is expected to add a minimum of a million dollars per week to the budget. This does not include the extra expenditures undertaken by the parent company's other news divisions, including local TV and radio stations. Nor does it include lost advertising dollars or spiralling costs should the war effort against terrorism expand to, say, Iraq. Mel Karmazin estimated that by the end of the year the war effort's cost to his company could reach five hundred million dollars. AOL Time Warner says that it does not compute the additional costs to CNN, and Gerald Levin says that he will pay any price: "Whatever it takes, particularly as it relates to news gathering." Reflecting a common, if perhaps temporary, sentiment about his corporate superiors, Dan Rather told me, "From Sumner Redstone to Mel Karmazin to Les Moonves, everything we needed we got. They've been marvellously supportive at a cost to the corporation. Supportive to a degree I would not have thought possible."

Optimists believe that the tragedy of September 11th could give a lasting sense of purpose to a diminished profession. Even such critics as Rory O'Connor, who says he decided to leave CBS after he was asked to produce a "48 Hours" on the subject of fat, agree. "The worm has turned," O'Connor, who co-founded Globalvision with Schechter, says now. "The audience wants more information." O'Connor's optimism is echoed by Tom Brokaw, who believes that the press will expand America's appetite for international news; he hopes that, since news is cheaper to produce than entertainment, perhaps the networks will make more time for serious news programming. Peter Jennings says, "The country's definition of foreign news has changed forever. What we learned from this crisis—from the airplanes that crashed on September 11th to the potential horror of a smallpox scare—is that everything about this story is about globalization." The events of September 11th have prompted NBC to "hire more people overseas," Neal Shapiro says, and he believes that NBC's being part of a large, rich company like General Electric will be advantageous.

But many of these people are not wholly convinced that the networks' approach to foreign news has changed fundamentally. "It's still a work in progress," Brokaw said.

"Nobody wants to say that television is going to return to its usual ways," Jennings said. "But there is some anxiety that, without assertive leadership at the top of the company, it will." CNN's Aaron Brown, asked if he thought the crisis would permanently bolster the amount of international news on the air, said, "My head doesn't know, and my gut says yes." Dan Rather, aware that foreign coverage is costlier and that management will continue to try to make news "a profit center," says, "I'm hopeful, but I'm not optimistic."

Certain forces are immutable: despite a momentary surge in ratings, the news audience is likely to continue its general trend, growing older and smaller, and that will shrink advertising revenue. And to

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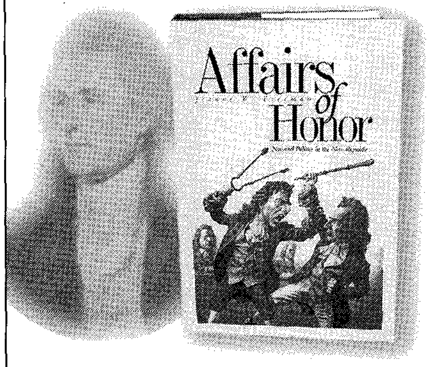

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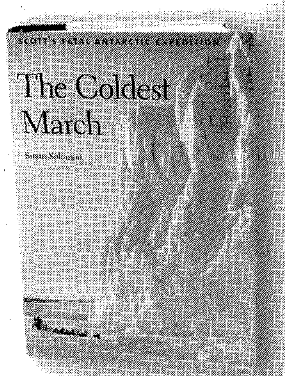

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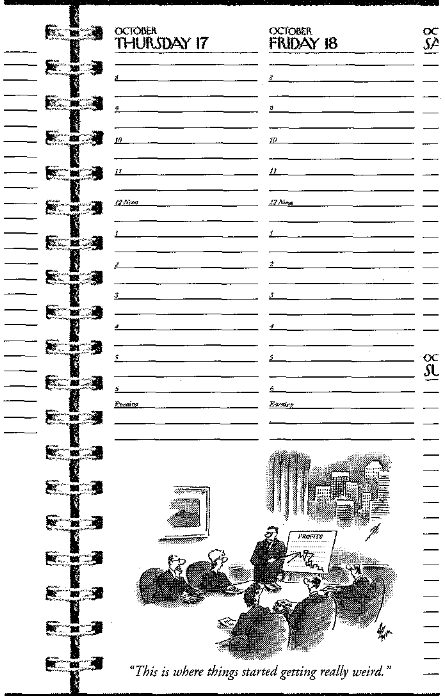
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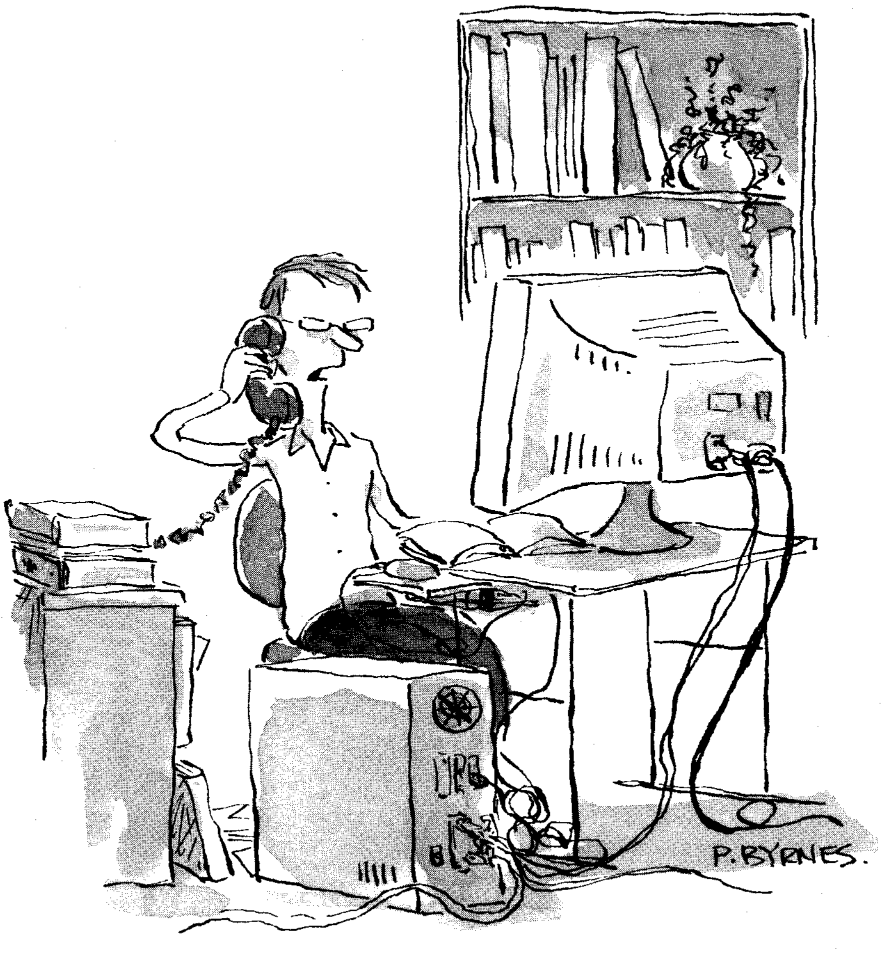
slow the loss of audience share, especially among younger viewers, the three major networks will once more go for the broadest possible appeal, often at the expense of seriousness. With more channels to choose from, the networks' audiences will decline. Rising costs, coupled with an economic recession, will cause revenues to plummet further. As a result of these trends, Wall Street and shareholders will push management to cut spending. Media corporations traditionally court Wall Street more than their own news divisions, and, in the past, when forced to choose they have opted to please Wall Street. In all, it is a bleak picture. The news divisions' profit margins will continue to trail those of most other divisions, and the drive for a corporate team culture will encourage the news divisions to get with the program and keep up with their peers.

"The larger the entities that own and control the news operations, the more distant they become," Dan Rather says. He knew William Paley well when Paley ran the network, through the early eighties, but he barely knows the current C.E.O., Sumner Redstone. "At one time, news was an integral part of the corporation," Rather explains. "The person who ran the corporation was intimate with the people in news and had a dialogue with them that provided a little check and balance to the drive for profits and ratings."

The picture may become even bleaker when the three main network anchormen, Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings, retire. Rather turned seventy on October 31st, and although he says, "My plan is to keep on as long as I can do it," he has already held the job five years longer than his predecessor, Walter Cronkite. Jennings is sixty-three and his contract expires early this summer; for years, he has professed a desire to go back to reporting. Brokaw will be sixty-two in February, and had considered retiring in 2002, in order to spend more time writing. All three have a kind of vestigial authority within their networks—they are links to a different and better era—but when they are gone the executives may well feel liberated to



"I know it's tech support, but, for two-fifty a minute, I expect you to talk dirty."

cut costs even more. Brokaw, for example, has been hammered by critics like David Halberstam for preaching the value of foreign news while presiding over a program that has cut it to the bone; and yet Brokaw argues, in his own defense, that he has resisted still deeper cuts.

Already there is evidence that executives are getting anxious about the ratings decline and the cost of covering the war. One network-news president told me that by November a quiet backlash had begun. Only ABC broke into its prime-time schedule at 8 P.M. on Thursday, November 8th, to carry an address by President Bush, a decision that was perhaps influenced by its own weak offering that night, "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" No doubt, NBC and CBS declined to preëmpt their programs because they had two of the top-rated prime-time shows ("Friends" and "Survivor"); Fox was counter-programming with a cartoon show ("Family Guy"). One ABC correspondent says that network executives and senior producers are pressing the prime-time magazine shows to return to softer stories and to relegate war-related magazine pieces to a projected 8 P.M. Friday slot. Although NBC's "Today" show still leads the ratings, it is slumping; the network's news president, Neal Shapiro, told the *Times*, "We stayed in the war game too long." To compensate for the escalation in news costs, the Walt Disney Corporation, which owns ABC, has ordered other ABC divisions to reduce spending. NBC's president, Andrew Lack, says that the network will offset any news cost increases with compensating budget reductions or revenue increases elsewhere.

At CBS, Leslie Moonves says that he is turning his attention back to the financial ledger. With the budget at CBS News having grown considerably since September 11th, he will have to find compensating cuts elsewhere in order to meet his projected profit numbers. "60 Minutes" has been asked to pare five or six associate producers. "Earnings is what I'm judged on," Moonves said. He foresees a future that resembles nothing so much as the recent past, the days before the horror at the southern end of Manhattan. "We're in a competitive business," he says, "and ratings will be important for the news magazines and for the news telecasts. As you get further away from September 11th, that will revert back to normal." ♦

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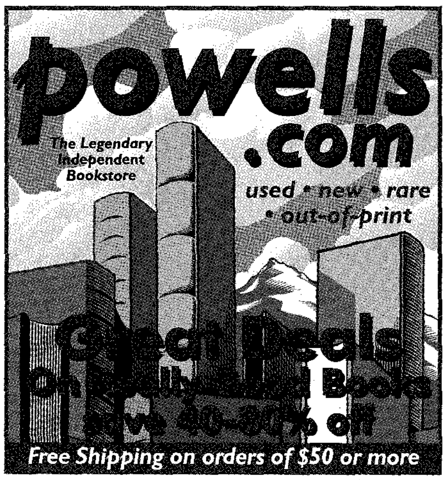
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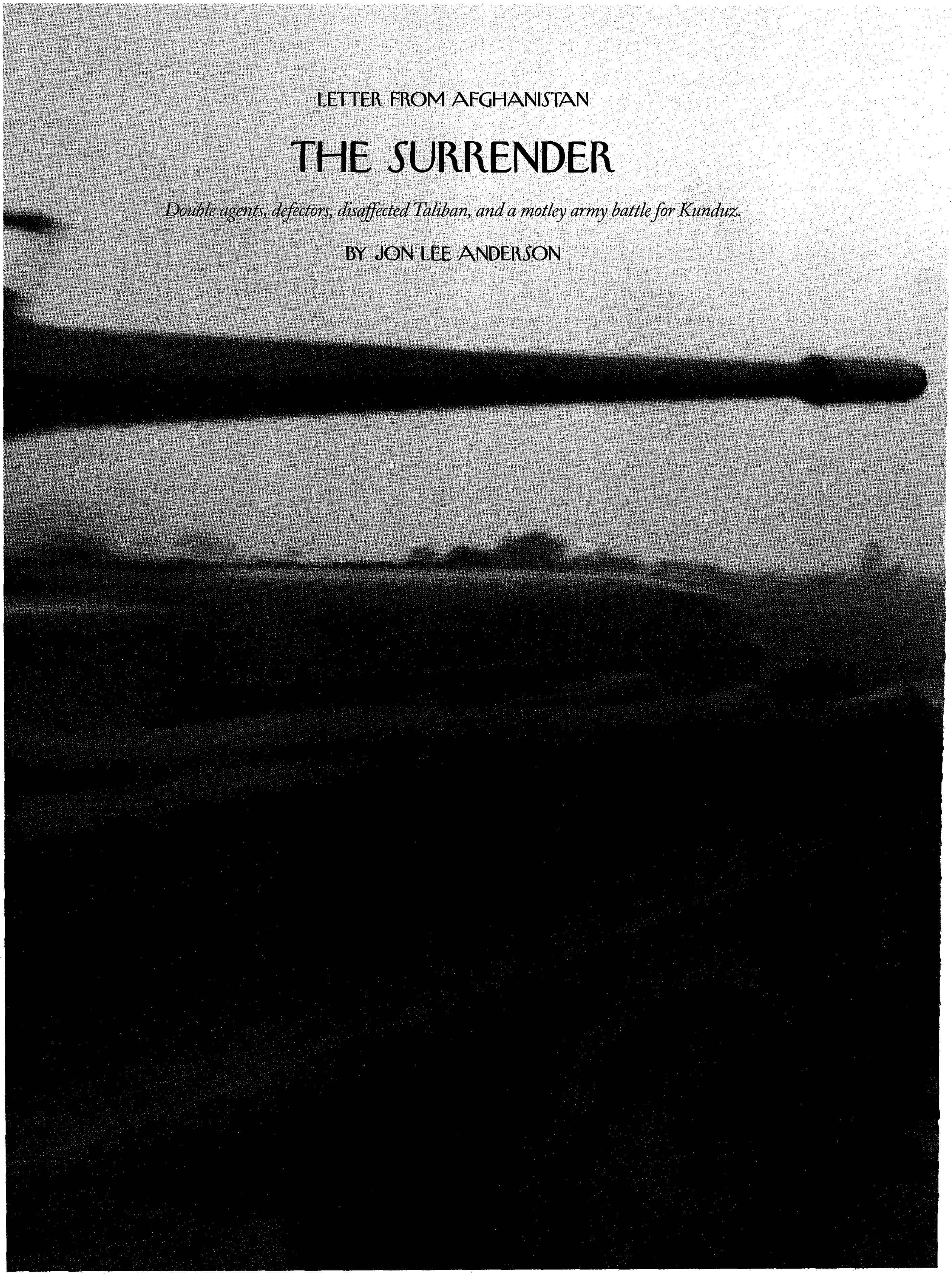
LETTER FROM AFGHANISTAN

THE SURRENDER

Double agents, defectors, disaffected Taliban, and a motley army battle for Kunduz.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON



Excited Northern Alliance soldiers on the road from Taloqan to Kunduz, in northeastern Afghanistan. Kunduz, which was one of t

MAGNUM

st bastions of the Taliban, fell on November 26th, after days of bombing and negotiating. Photograph by Thomas Dworzak.*

Abdullah Gard lives in a run-down concrete-block house in Taloqan, a city of about two hundred thousand people in a fertile valley in northern Afghanistan. The headquarters of Ahmed Shah Massoud, the late defense minister of the Northern Alliance, was in Taloqan until September, 2000, when the Taliban captured the city. Abdullah Gard helped the Northern Alliance defend Taloqan, and when Massoud retreated, he went with him. But early this year Gard surprised many people who knew him by defecting, with his fighting force of several hundred men, to the Taliban. They fought against their former comrades-in-arms for months. Then, on November 11th, as the Taliban abandoned one Afghan city after another, including Taloqan, Abdullah Gard and his men switched sides again.

I visited Abdullah Gard late one blustery afternoon a week after his most recent defection. Girls with brooms made of twigs were sweeping up autumn leaves under the plane trees outside his house. The gates in front of the house were guarded by a dozen turbanned fighters, and in the dusty yard children drew water from a well by hand. Several men escorted me into an upstairs room with red carpets on the floor and flat red cushions around the sides. It was the third day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, about an hour before sunset prayers and the end of the day's fasting. A teakettle was set on a brazier in the corner, boiling water for the first tea to be drunk since sunrise. Through the window you could watch an American B-52 bomber flying slowly over Taloqan, trailed by double jet streams. The plane was on its way back from a bombing run over the nearby city of Kunduz, where thousands of Afghan, Chechen, Pakistani, Uzbek, and Arab fighters were still entrenched.

Abdullah Gard is a burly, bearded man in his late thirties. Three of his officers lounged around the room, staring at me, and one of them, a thin, gray-eyed man who played with plastic worry beads, glared suspiciously. Gard listened attentively as I explained my interest in understanding why he had switched sides twice in the war. Even one defection seemed anomalous to a Westerner, and the Afghans' acceptance of such things was puzzling. Gard replied that he was a special case, because—and this was the first time he had discussed this, he said—he had been acting secretly on orders from Massoud. He was a double agent. "I was to find out how many foreign troops there were here with the Taliban, their nationalities, who their commanders were, and their plans. And I was supposed to help Massoud from inside Taloqan when he launched an attack." Massoud was the only person who knew of the mission at first, but after Massoud was assassinated, on September 9th, a few others were brought into the picture. Most people still did not know why Abdullah Gard had switched sides.

Gard said that the majority of foreign troops in the north were "Punjabis," by which he meant Pakistanis; Uzbeks in the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, led by Juma Namangani; Arabs of various nationalities; and Chechens. He said that they disagreed about strategy, although the common goal, of course, was the liberation of all of Afghanistan. But the Pakistanis argued that their country should be liberated next, and the Uzbeks insisted that it should be Uzbekistan. Not so long ago, Gard said, there was a rumor that Osama bin Laden had visited the north, but it was never confirmed, and he didn't see him.

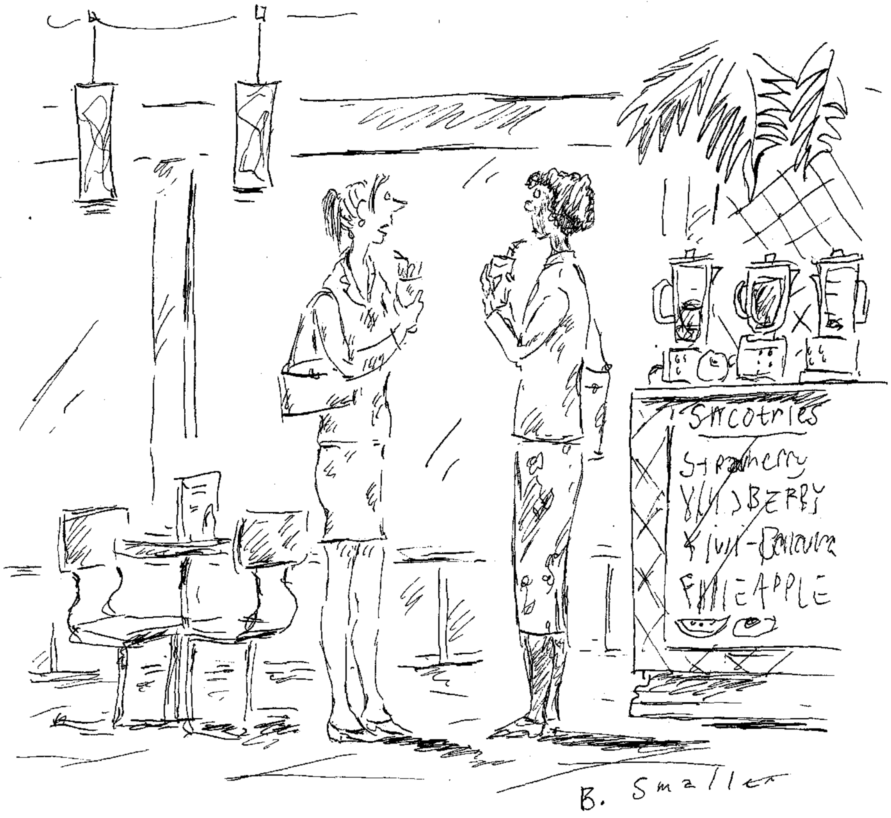
Not all of the Taliban had been convinced by Gard's defection, and he was kept under surveillance. Once, he and his men were disarmed and he was told to stay in his home. During that period, he said, he refrained from contact with Massoud. Then, after a month, his command was returned to him. Just before the fall of Taloqan, he came under suspicion again. For most of his time with the Taliban, Gard said, he and his men operated as a mobile reserve battalion, and they were dispatched to places beyond Taloqan and Kunduz, such as Mazar-i-Sharif, Bamian, and Kabul.

I asked Gard how he had managed to persuade his fighters to go along with the ruse. He smiled. "That is my secret," he said affably. I pressed him. Surely, I said, he must have made an effort to avoid having his men on the forward lines, where they might kill his real allies? On the contrary, he replied. "I sent my men to the front line, and they were in some very bloody battles. Once, fifteen of them were captured, including five officers. One was taken prisoner and the other four were rearmed and returned to the battlefield as Northern Alliance fighters." Gard smiled, and shrugged. "They could not be told the truth, ever."

Gard said that he didn't particularly want to remain in the military. "If my country is secure, I would prefer not to continue being a commander." But how would he survive? "God is kind," he replied. "He will help us survive." He had three wives, with whom he had had two sons and two daughters. Maybe he would have time to make more children. He laughed, and his officers laughed, too. It was sunset by then, and he left the room to pray.

In the first week of its liberation from Taliban control, Taloqan bustled and heaved with returning refugees and Northern Alliance fighters. Military vehicles, their horns blaring, careened around slow-moving donkey carts, darting children, and porters pulling handcarts loaded with goods. Jitneys drawn by horses adorned with ornamental red bobbles and jingling bells served as taxis. Occasionally, a helicopter clattered overhead, and several times a day B-52s added their dull roar to the din. Groups of boys hung out in front of newly opened kiosks where music blared and cassettes were sold. Under the Taliban, music was banned.

Taloqan is laid out in a geometrical grid of streets that are flanked by drainage ditches and lines of plane trees. Many houses are built of concrete rather than mud, and the main street is paved. The Taloqan River flows past the edge of town, and the land nearby is good for farming. Food stalls were stocked with fresh cauliflower, onions, radishes, red and yellow apples, pomegranates. Slaughtered lambs hung from meat hooks in butchers' stalls. There was plenty of the flat wheat bread, called naan, in the bakeries. The town has several *chaikhanas*, the traditional Afghan teahouses, where men gather to drink tea and eat kebab and rice with mutton. The *chaikhanas* provide space for sleeping,



"Sex brought us together, but gender drove us apart."

• •

and at night large wooden platforms were filled with dozens of men lying willy-nilly alongside one another.

At the western end of town, the main street turns into the road to Kunduz, which lies forty miles away. The road snakes across a plain planted with wheat and dotted with small family farms. Mountains rise on all sides of the plain: a rumpled yellow, brown, and red anatomy of treeless hills ascend to great, snowcapped ridges. The new front line began at a bridge over a river near the village of Bangi, about twenty miles outside of Taloqan. The Taliban and the Northern Alliance were faced off at either end of a small valley, a half mile or so from each other. By mid-November, the fields were clipped stubble. As military trucks and tanks raced back and forth, children stood guard over husked wheat kernels that were spread out for drying in rectangular patches along the road.

One morning, I visited the military headquarters of Commander Daoud Khan, of the Northern Alliance, who was overseeing the reoccupation of Taloqan. There was a Toyota pickup truck smeared with mud outside the gate. Daoud's men told me that the truck had been driven across enemy lines and into town during the night by six Taliban field commanders who had defected, along with their three hundred fighters. I met two of the Taliban, dark men in dishevelled black robes and turbans. They were surrounded by staring mujahideen, as the fighters of the Northern Alliance are known. I asked one of the Taliban, who said his name was Muhammad Israel, why he had decided to defect, and he said that he had done so for the good of the country, in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Given the fact that Kunduz was being bombed from the air and encircled by the Northern Alliance, I suggested, his decision appeared to have more to do with survival, but Israel pointed out that crossing Taliban lines with three hundred men, all of whom faced certain death if they were detected, had been very risky. He seemed to expect to be commended for his bravery, and when I moved away he and the other Taliban were regaling a group of mujahideen with the details of their nocturnal adventure.

Commander Daoud, a former Massoud aide, is a tall, strapping man in his late thirties. He said that since he had taken control of Taloqan, thirty local Taliban commanders had switched sides, bringing with them three thousand men. He was hoping that more would follow. "I don't want an attack to be launched on Kunduz," he said. "I want all the Taliban in Kunduz to surrender and be taken captive." He conceded that this was a faint prospect, given the large number of foreign fighters in the city, most of whom were thought to be ready to fight to the death. "If they don't accept this, then we have no recourse but to push forward, and to kill them."

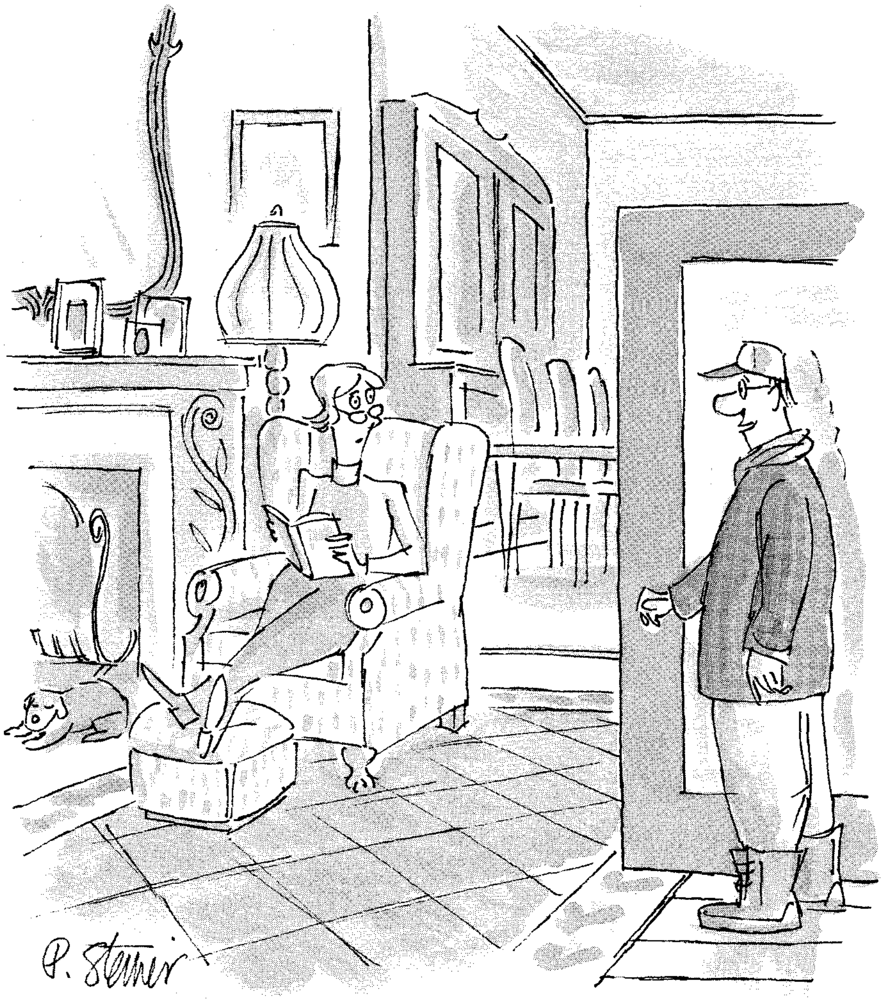
Daoud told me that the former Taliban commander in Taloqan, Mullah Shabir Ahmed, was in "a safe location." My translator, Yama, the twenty-four-year-old son of the logistics chief for the Northern Alliance in this region, asked around and discovered that the safe location was Daoud's home, and he talked the guards there into letting us in. The mullah, a rather pale, wan man in his mid-thirties, with a long reddish beard, met me in an upstairs cubicle in a small building just inside the front gate. He sat near the room's sole window, an AK-47 assault rifle resting on the sill behind him. "I was studying at a madrasah in Pakistan," he said, in a reedy, tired-sounding voice, "and when the Taliban began I joined and entered Afghanistan with them, filled with pure Islamic feeling. In the beginning, this feeling we had was splendid, but, more recently, we have begun having doubts about some of the commanders who are with the Taliban"—he was alluding to the bin Laden crowd of foreigners—"and, following the martyrdom of Ahmed Shah Massoud, we realized that outside hands, terrorists, were involved in the movement. So, for the good of the country, we decided to come over to the Northern Alliance." He and the two commanders under him—both men were in the room and nodded to me as he pointed them out—and several hundred fighters remained behind in Taloqan and turned themselves over to Daoud. The rest of the Taliban retreated to Kunduz. Shabir Ahmed said that he had stayed on to insure the security of the town, and he had personally called Daoud to tell him that the way into Taloqan was safe. That was how Taloqan had been reconquered by the Northern Alliance.

Shabir Ahmed had not revised his Muslim beliefs. "I am still proud of the name Taliban," he said. "As for those incidents in the West"—the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—"those were not the actions of the Taliban, but of terrorists. It's hurtful to hear the Taliban name insulted, and to see it used by others who have their own purposes in mind." He said that he didn't agree with all of the Taliban edicts, like the ban on kite flying and the prohibition of music, "but there are aspects of sharia"—Islamic law—"which we do think are important, such as the rule against rape, pederasty, and fornication, against gambling and drinking alcohol. And also the importance of beards. These are things commanded by the messenger of Islam." He didn't think that all Muslims necessarily had to wear beards, and he opposed the destruction of the giant Buddhas at Bamian. "They posed no danger to Islam, and they were part of Afghanistan's history," he said. Mullah Shabir Ahmed spoke in a chant-like monotone that gave him, whether by intention or practice, a priest-like quality. He swayed back and forth slightly. I noticed that he had very clean, white manicured fingernails and toenails.

The Northern Alliance mobilization for the advance on Kunduz began on November 22nd, Thanksgiving Day in the United States, amid conflicting rumors about negotiations for a surrender. Hundreds of mujahideen armed with rocket-propelled grenade launchers and Kalashnikovs began arriving in trucks and pickups at the Bangi front line. A large group of ethnic-Tajik Taliban had agreed to defect, and they were to rendezvous with representatives of the Northern Alliance at a village about a mile away. The sky was a deep and cloudless blue. A B-52 looped ponderously overhead, dropping bombs on the Taliban positions. B-52s are deceptively unthreatening. They drop their bombs while making banking curves, and there is a strange delay between the curves and the explosions, which appear to occur far from the bombers' flight path. On its third or fourth run, the B-52 dropped a tremendous bomb on the summit of a Taliban ridge—perhaps a thousand feet above the valley floor—sending a giant brown-gray cloud of dust and dirt cascading down the mountainside and eventually covering it, like an avalanche. Moments later, as the B-52 returned, men ran over the sides of the next Taliban ridge—which was still receiving tank fire—sending up their own dust clouds as they scrambled down the scree.

There was pandemonium at the Northern Alliance end of the valley, which looked like the scene of some kind of postmodern biblical theatrical event. Few officers appeared to be present, and mujahideen were swarming around aimlessly, their weapons pointing in all directions. Jeeps and trucks raced back and forth. Turbanned men wearing blankets had spiky antitank rockets sticking out like arrows from quivers on their backs. Others wore bandoliers of shiny brass bullets, which crisscrossed their torsos. There were flashes and booms from tanks and Katyusha rocket launchers and, in the foreground, autumn wheat fields and a few flocks of longhaired black goats near the crumbling, fortresslike mud compounds of peasant farmers. Here and there, in random solitude, men knelt on their scarves, bending and rising in rhythmic prayer.

Sometime in the midafternoon, the mob of mujahideen began to scatter, cocking their weapons as they scrambled down the road. You could hear the sharp metallic clicks of their safeties snapping off. The men were screaming "Talib! Talib!" and some of them were pointing down the right side of the valley, where billowing dust clouds followed several pickup trucks headed in our direction. The trucks were carrying the defecting Taliban, and the panic subsided when the mujahideen realized that there was no hostile intent. Men who had run in the opposite direction came walking back, grinning as others teased them about their mistake. Within a few minutes, several of the pickups had roared across the bridge, and they came ripping



"What kind of fire, hon—oak, maple, or apple?"

through the crowd of mujahideen, who were still yelling "Talib," but smiling now. The Taliban were all armed to the teeth.

A big Russian Kamaz truck with a howitzer mounted on the back pulled up to great cheers. It was filled with Northern Alliance soldiers from the group that had gone to the rendezvous with the Taliban. (It turned out that during the rendezvous the defecting Taliban and the Northern Alliance greeting party had come under fire from more stalwart Taliban, and had had to run for it.) A few minutes later, the truck started off, heading toward Taloqan, and the mujahideen on the ground became angry. All of a sudden, I found myself standing alone in the road as the men on the truck pointed guns and half a dozen rocket-propelled grenades at the men who had been congratulating them and who were now screaming and pointing *their* guns. A battle seemed about to break out among the mujahideen over who was to take possession of the truck, and, indeed, as the truck pulled away, a soldier near me fired his gun, although the shot was high and in the air.

More pickups carrying Taliban appeared and parked on the road. I asked one young Talib, a husky youth in his early twenties dressed all in black, why he had defected, and he shrugged. "I came because my commander decided we should come," he said. He was from a province near the Tajik border, and he was looking forward to going home. When I asked him if he still considered himself a Talib, he said, "Yes, of course. I am a student of the Koran, and tomorrow I will still be a Talib. It is a holy thing to be."

Around three o'clock, the mujahideen began running or riding in trucks down the road toward several copses of trees that marked the Northern Alliance forward line. More tank, rocket, and machine-gun fire could be heard. Word trickled back that somewhere down there four Taliban had been killed. The B-52 bombed some more. The tanks on the ridges fired continuously, and after a while I could see that the Northern Alliance soldiers—their silhouettes clearly visible against the sky—had moved one ridge closer to the Taliban.

The Taliban commanders who had led the defecting troops were meeting with their Northern Alliance counterparts in a small room in a farmhouse. The room was dank and full of people; it reminded me of a photograph from the early days of the Russian Revolution. One of the two Taliban, a man with a red beard and a concerned expression, was talking to General Nazir, a senior Northern Alliance commander. Nazir was clicking worry beads and listening intently. The man was saying that the Taliban positions on the hill and in the valley ahead were very strong, and that the General should move his men out of their present positions and attack from the right side of the valley. The Taliban who were entrenched in the town of Khanabad had eighty tanks and most of them were ready to resist to the death, he said. There were others who were willing to switch sides but had no one to help them. He advised Nazir to tell Commander Daoud that he should make contact with the Taliban commanders in Kunduz and Khanabad, and that many would defect if he could help arrange ways for them to do so. He criticized Nazir for the lax behavior of the mujahideen at the Bangi front line.

Back on the road, a scuffle was taking place between a mujahideen and a Talib. They were fighting over the Talib's jeep. I walked on, and about five minutes later I heard a bang, and once again people were running around and pointing their guns. Soon word came that a mujahideen had accidentally shot someone in the buttocks and grazed another man's head.

As the Taliban continued to defect during the next few days, I would often ask Yama, my translator, to identify the groups of fighters we saw near the Bangi front line. "Are they Talib or mujahideen?" There seemed to me to be precious little to distinguish them. Usually, the Taliban came across the front in vehicles covered in mud, to avoid detection from the air, but they wore virtually the same clothes as the mujahideen: pocketed vests, patou blankets, tunic and pantaloon outfits, a motley assortment of winter jackets, turbans, and scarves. They also carried the same weapons: Russian-made Kalashnikovs and antitank weapons. And they all drove Toyota pickups and Russian UAZ military jeeps and Kamaz trucks.

In general, the Taliban have fuller, longer beards than the mujahideen. The Taliban (though not all of them) wear black turbans, sometimes wrapped Tuareg style over their faces and necks against the wind and cold. Their commanders, who are often mullahs—although many of them are given the title simply out of respect—usually wear white turbans. The trademark headgear of the mujahideen is a flat-brimmed felt cap (brown, gray, beige, or white) called the *pakul*, which was worn by Massoud, and which became popular among the mujahideen during the anti-Soviet jihad of the nineteen-eighties. Not all mujahideen wear the *pakul*, however. Some merely wrap a striped or checked scarf over their heads or loop it around their necks. Or they wear a turban.

The Northern Alliance mujahideen are an unruly, noisy rabble much of the time, but the Taliban's fighters appear poised, watchful, and reserved. Those who defected to the Northern Alliance came in convoys, and at the handover points they usually stayed inside their vehicles, with the windows rolled up, or in the beds of trucks, sitting with their weapons next to piled-up gear. They would not speak, for the most part, unless given the O.K. to do so by a senior officer, and, when they did, they had an air of self-confidence. The mujahideen appeared to be in awe of them, and with good reason. Until the U.S. began making air strikes, the mujahideen were consistently defeated by the Taliban on the battlefield.

Ghulam Sarwar Akbari owns a bookstore in Taloqan. He is a thin man in his early fifties with a pockmarked face and a gentle manner. He has large, intelligent eyes, and speaks some English, shyly. I met him in his house, a modest two-story building near a soccer field where military helicopters now take off and land throughout the day. Two of his grandchildren, both toddlers, played at his feet in the common room of the house. One of them has vision problems, and he wore adult eyeglasses that frequently slipped off his face.

Akbari grew up in Taloqan and went to a technical high school in Kabul, where he trained to become an air-traffic controller for the new Afghanistan that never came to be. He studied aviation and meteorology, and in the seventies, when the modernizing government of Mohammad Daoud was in power, he worked at different U.N.-sponsored weather stations around the country until returning to Taloqan, where he had a job at the airport. When the jihad against the Communist regime began, the airport and its facilities were destroyed. In the early eighties, the government of Babrak Karmal gave him the means to rebuild the weather station in Taloqan. This was a good time in his life, he says. "Government employees could survive on their salaries, and there were special coupon shops where we could buy things." Life continued in this fashion until the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, in 1989, when Massoud's mujahideen took Taloqan. The new weather station was destroyed, and it was never rebuilt. Fearing for his life because of his affiliation with the Communist-backed government, Akbari fled with his family, along with the retreating government forces, to a village nearby. But the village fell to the mujahideen, and Akbari fled with his family again. In the early nineties, he moved to Kunduz, where he had a shop that sold items like shampoo and sugar and tea. When an amnesty was declared by the mujahideen government, he returned to Taloqan.

SELF-PORTRAIT IN A GOLD KIMONO

Born, I was born.
Tears represent how much my mother loves me,
shivering and steaming like a horse in rain.
My heart as innocent as Buddha's,
my name a Parisian bandleader's,
I am trying to stand.
Father is holding me and blowing in my ear,
like a glassblower on a flame.
Stars on his blue serge uniform flaunt a feeling
of formal precision and stoicism.
Growing, I am growing now,
as straight as red pines in the low mountains.
Please don't leave, Grandmother Pearl.
I become distressed
watching the President's caisson.
We, we together move to the big house.
Shining, the sun is shining on my time line.
Tears, copper-hot tears,
spatter the house
when Father is drunk, irate and boisterous.
The essence of self emerges
shuttling between parents.

Akbari said that he had been a socialist, but that he didn't approve of many of the old government's ethnic policies, especially what he described as its partiality toward Pashtuns at the expense of other groups. Akbari is an Uzbek. "I believed, and still believe, that Afghan sovereignty should be preserved and the rights of all ethnic nationalities should be observed." I asked him whether he believed in the separation of church and state—a concept that is alien to most Afghans in the northern provinces—and he nodded.

Akbari described life in Taloqan under Massoud, when he first seized control, as difficult. "He seemed very strict; he tried to persuade people to pray and ordered women to wear Islamic coverings"—although not the burkha, which many rural women wore anyway. "Some people were imprisoned, and I felt in danger from Massoud's fighters. But this attitude became more moderate over time, especially after Najib"—President Najibullah, the Soviet-backed leader, who resigned in 1992—"was overthrown and the Islamic government decreed an amnesty." When the Taliban arrived in town, he was selling books of all kinds. His customers were most interested in history and fiction, he said, both foreign translations and books by Afghan and Iranian authors. Among their favorites were the works of Victor Hugo, Balzac, and John Reed, and books on politics and the military by the Najib-era Afghan general Azimi, as well as an Afghan history book by the late Mir Gholam Muhammad Ghobar, a classic.

"When the Taliban came to Taloqan, they always came to the shop," Akbari said, "looking for prohibited books, especially about politics and religion, and for any that might have images in them." He hid most of the books he thought they would find offensive. The only title they did confiscate, he says, was a songbook with the lyrics of the Afghan singer Ahmed Zahir. They didn't force him to sell religious books, but, since they were always asking for them, he and other booksellers tried to keep a good supply in stock. He gave me a look that said "Business is business." Now that the Taliban have left, he said, he has brought back out the books he'd hidden.

I asked him how he felt about seeing former Taliban walking, as it were, hand in hand with the Northern Alliance. What about the former Taliban commander of Taloqan, Mullah Shabir Ahmed? "I am at a loss about this merging of the two forces," he said. "Yesterday, Shabir Ahmed was a mullah wearing a turban and today he is living in Daoud Khan's house! And there are others who were wearing turbans and are now in *pakuls*, walking the streets." Akbari was appalled. "Every time a new government comes into power, the local strongmen change their disguises. They face up to no responsibility for the misfortune their wars cause to the civilians." He began to suggest that it was, as others had told me, the result of "foreign meddling." But Afghans were always blaming outsiders for their misfortunes, I said. He nodded, unperturbed. "Then it must be because of the poverty of the people. Need drives them to survive any way possible." A neighbor who had come in interjected, "It's all because of foreigners who want something from Afghanistan! Afghanistan is like a football kicked around between outsiders." Akbari concurred: "When there was fighting here between the government and the mujahideen, America helped the mujahideen in order to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan. After the Soviets left, and the mujahideen were victorious, America, instead of helping them to create a good government, forgot about Afghanistan. America shouldn't have done this. It should have helped the mujahideen until there was a

Noel, the wet nimbus of Noel's tongue
draws me out of the pit.
I drop acid with Rita.
Chez Nguyen eros is released.
I eat sugar like a canary from a grown man's tongue.
The draft card torn up;
the war lost.
I cling like a cicada to the latticework of memory.
Mother: "I have memories, too.
Don't let me forget them."
Father: "I'm glad the journey is set.
I'm glad I'm going."
Crows, the voices of crows
leaving their nests at dawn, circle around,
as I sit in a gold kimono,
feeling the subterranean magma flows,
the sultry air, the hand holding a pen,
bending to write,
Thank you,
Mother and Father, for creating me.

—*Henri Cole*

good government here. If that had been done, all this side-switching would never have happened."

On Sunday, November 25th, after the last large defection of Taliban troops, Commander Daoud Khan took a convoy part of the way up the valley toward Kunduz. We drove there early Monday morning, and around five o'clock began seeing mujahideen walking in the direction of Kunduz, large groups and small, as shambolic as usual. We drove around a large bomb crater with a smashed military vehicle at the bottom of it, and just before dawn, at a fringe of trees some four or five miles outside Kunduz, we caught up with the Northern Alliance army as it gathered for the advance on the city.

Abdullah Gard, the commander who had, on Massoud's orders, engineered a fake defection to the Taliban in order to gather intelligence, was coördinating the advance. He wore a *pakul* and green military fatigues with a gold-white-and-black scarf around his neck, and he carried a field radio. The Taliban were supposed to be moving to an area near the Kunduz airport, where they were to be disarmed and transported by General Dostum's forces to a fort near Mazar-i-Sharif, a hundred miles to the west—although since many prisoners had already been killed in a battle at the fort the previous day, I wondered how coöperative the new group of prospective prisoners would be.

Abdullah Gard got out of his truck and began to walk, and so did we, sticking close to him. When the outskirts of the town were just visible across a low bridge, he climbed into a muddy graveyard, where the hummocks of graves were marked with flags on poles and metal placards with Koranic lettering, and listened to his radio. The front part of the convoy, mostly troops on foot, massed between open fields and walled family compounds. After about ten minutes, Gard walked back to the road and vanished with a large group of men. He had been asked to lead a flanking party toward a number of foreign Taliban who were believed to be hiding at the edge of the city. We were left with the soldiers on the main road, and, without any high-ranking commander in sight, we followed them as they crossed the low bridge and moved into the suburbs and toward the center of Kunduz. We were still moving on foot, with our jeep trailing behind.

There was some sporadic weapons fire and some rocket thumps, and soon we were in a more densely populated area, where civilians stood watching us pass. A mosque was at the end of the road, perhaps six blocks ahead. In a few minutes, word came down the line that a gun battle was taking place in the center of town, and cars began whizzing past us in wild retreat. Our driver was yelling for us to join the exodus, which we did, and then ordered him to stop so that we could find out what had happened. We started and stopped two or three times over the next hour or so. About four blocks from the mosque, a man appeared in the center of the street, moving slowly toward us, and as he passed I saw that he was covered with blood, and that one of his arms was loosely bound with an olive-green bandage. He held the injured arm with his good arm, and walked on, in a kind of determined trance, away from the center of town and whatever had happened there.

Around nine o'clock, Commander Daoud arrived from Taloqan with an entourage, and, as I waited to see him, I talked to friends of my translator, Yama, who is from Kunduz. They said that during the night there had been heavy bombing by American warplanes near the airport, and that there was a rumor that Pakistani planes had arrived, or tried to land, to evacuate Pakistani officers who were with the Taliban, and other foreign Taliban. Yama's friends spoke to one another in Dari, and I noticed that they used the English word "terrorist" (pronounced "tor-roh-riste"), which has evidently become part of the Afghan lexicon. No one knew whether the planes had been able to land or not, or what had happened, just as no one seemed to know what was happening in the city at that moment.

Someone told Yama that it was O.K. to go to the center of town, but when we got to the corner of the main street people were running, vehicles sped crazily past us, there was dust everywhere, and our driver beckoned frantically from the jeep, which was already moving. I climbed in, and once again we were leaving town without any clue about what was going on. Cars with fighters inside them roared by, but no one would stop. After about fifteen or twenty minutes, we began walking and driving back, and met a dishevelled American journalist from the online magazine *Salon* who had been left behind by his driver. He said that there had been a fight between two rival Northern Alliance groups over Taliban cars.

In the bazaar area, several people were staring at the bodies of two Taliban fighters who lay dead in front of the shuttered shops. The bodies had been covered with robes, and people stopped to lift up the edges and peer at the corpses. The men had the gray, waxen look that even freshly dead people acquire. Blood coagulated in pools near their bodies. In one pool, a little plastic bag of *naswar*, the spicy chewing tobacco that most Afghan men use, sat upright. Further on, next to another shuttered shop, a wounded Talib lay on his side in a dusty, bleeding heap. He looked sideways at passersby above his outstretched arm. No one was tending to him or seemed very interested in him, except for a man who explained that the wounded soldier was a "Kandahari," meaning a Pashto-speaking Afghan from the south.

A group of soldiers appeared, leading five young, dark-skinned Taliban captives, their arms tied behind their backs with their turbans. They were dirty and looked terrified. The soldiers seemed not to have decided what to do with them and, trailed by curious onlookers, they led them up and down the main street and finally took them into a carter's yard, where one of the soldiers shut the yard's high metal gates behind them. Along with some other journalists, I followed them, our idea being to prevent the soldiers from executing their prisoners. The young men were Pashtuns, they said, from Helmand province, in southern Afghanistan, and just six weeks ago, a month before Ramadan, they had been forcibly conscripted and brought to Kunduz. They said that they didn't even know how to fight. Then, suddenly, their captors pushed them up some stairs and into a storage room. As we went up the stairs after them, the soldier who seemed to be in command stopped and said something to me in Dari. "He thinks you are an American military man," Yama explained, "and he wants you to give him a tip—*baksheesh*—because he has captured these Taliban." After some explanation about the difference between a journalist and a military man, which seemed to puzzle the soldier, he let me pass.

The prisoners sat on their knees on a floor covered with straw. The mujahideen who had asked me for a tip stood over them and yelled, and the photographers took pictures, and after a moment the soldier made everyone leave but me and a woman photographer. I asked the men why they hadn't surrendered, and they all answered at once. Their commander had left them behind when the shooting started, they said, and their comrades had run away. They had hidden, and when they saw Northern Alliance soldiers approaching they gave themselves up and handed over their weapons. The soldiers had cocked their guns as if to shoot them, and then hit them with their gun butts, and tied their arms behind their backs and led them away. I told them that I would try to intercede with their captors, who had by now disappeared.

There was a lot of activity on the street. Many ordinary people, men and youths, were walking around, smiling and giving the thumbs-up sign. A group of Northern Alliance soldiers were taping posters of President Rabbani and Massoud on a cement booth in the middle of a traffic circle. An old man held aloft a poster of Massoud and yelled "Down with Blind Mullah Omar, Long Live Massoud!" Just then Commander Daoud drove up, and his car was surrounded by people, including the soldiers who had captured the five hapless Helmandi Talibs. The prisoners had been taken out of the carter's storage room and were being dragged around again. The man who had asked me for a tip was talking to Daoud. Then he led the prisoners away. I asked Yama, who had been within hearing range, what the soldier was saying. "He was asking Daoud for a tip because he had captured those men," Yama said.

Yama led me half a block from the traffic circle, to a building with a hand-painted sign: "Let's Learn English: Kunduz English Language Centre: American and British Systems." It was his language school. He and his brothers ran it. They had hired several teachers in other subjects, like physics and mathematics, and it had become a kind of private high school, he explained. They had more than seven hundred students. We went back to the traffic circle, looking for our driver, and saw that the soldiers were still wandering around aimlessly with their prisoners. A little further along the road, a man pushed a handcart containing the wounded Taliban from the storefront.

A large number of vehicles were parked beside a huge field that stretched away from the walls of a factory on the edge of town. A standoff was taking place, soldiers told us, with a group of a hundred or so armed Taliban. We walked along the lane between the field and the factory and saw several Taliban with machine guns, some of them pointed toward us, on the perimeter wall of a small mosque, and in the street just outside, facing them, several Northern Alliance soldiers. About ten minutes after we arrived, there was a tremendous explosion, apparently from an incoming antitank rocket, which landed somewhere behind us, followed by machine-gun fire. The shooting was coming not from the mosque but from a recess in the factory wall, where a man in a black turban was aiming a rocket launcher. We all ran around the corner and threw ourselves into a deep ditch. The shooting, and more rocket explosions, continued for perhaps two minutes, and once or twice I popped my head up to see what was happening. All I could see was soldiers, lying prone or crouched in firing positions. Then it was quiet, and we left the ditch to take shelter behind the thick pillar of a house.

We took a circuitous route away from the factory, which was now cordoned off by soldiers, and drove to Yama's house, a compound in a pleasant working-class suburb of the city, with a well, a cookhouse, a mud-walled toilet, and a cow tethered in the yard. His brothers and cousins and little sisters (I never saw his mother, because it would have been inappropriate for her to appear before a strange man) welcomed him home, and, in spite of Ramadan, we were served a lunch of fried eggs and vegetables.

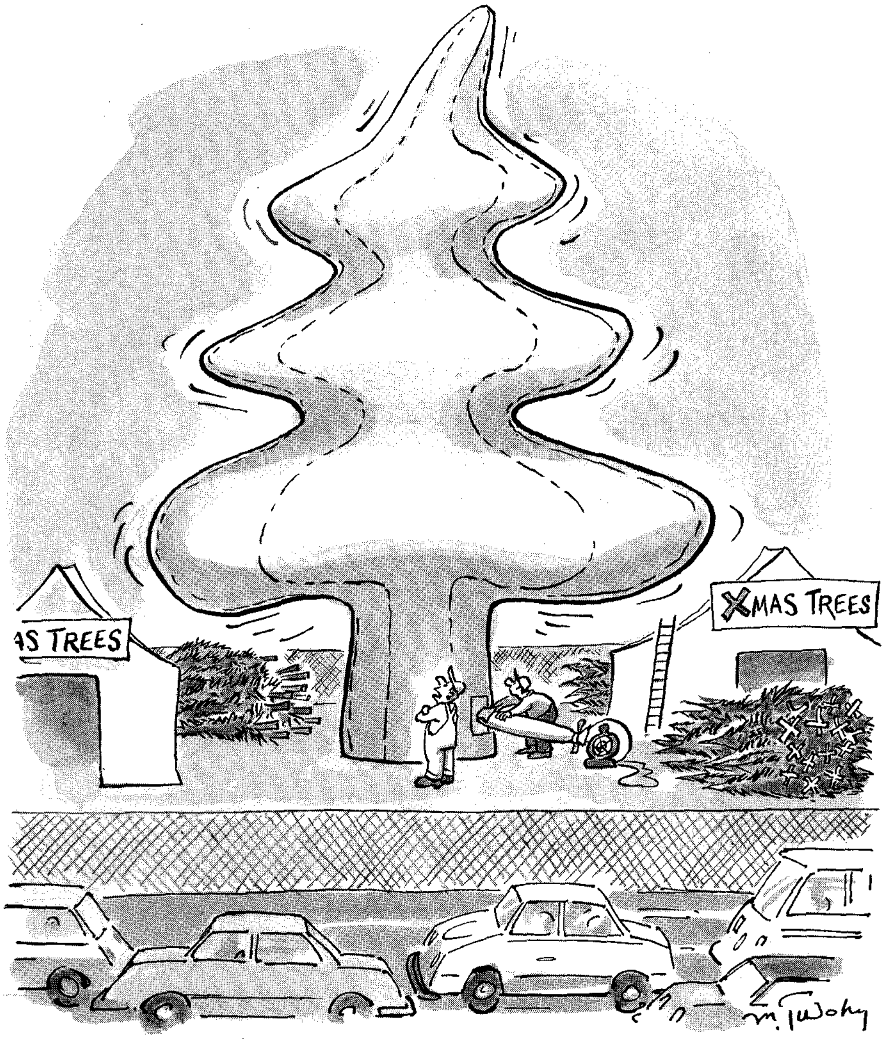
That afternoon, back in Taloqan, I looked up a man named Shahmurat, whom I had met several weeks earlier, when the American air campaign in Afghanistan began. Shahmurat is a big, irreverent man in his early fifties. He is the son of a relatively well-off rural landowner (two hundred acres of land and some livestock) and the respected elder of his home village. Shahmurat studied at an agricultural school in Kabul, and when he returned home, as he tells it, he was unanimously named the *arbob*, or headman, of his village. He was *arbob* for six years. "My job was to make peace, and to be the intermediary between the government and the people," he explained. He did this until the Communist regime that overthrew President Daoud came to power and the rural Afghan feudal system—and, with it, his job—was abolished. He remembers those years, the waning years of Zahir Shah's monarchy and Daoud's brief stint in power, as a good time. "There was a government that the people respected," he said, "and no one complained about economic problems. There was peace."

Shahmurat was among those who opposed the new regime and the changes it brought. "Enlightened people gathered together and took up arms against the Communist government, and began to fight," he said. He eventually signed on with the Jamiat-i-Islami organization headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Massoud. He fought with Jamiat against the Communists for five years, until one day he had a change of heart.

"After five years, I realized that this war was meaningless to me, that East and West were both involved in Afghanistan for their own designs. I cashiered my troops, gave my weapons to other commanders, and returned to my family in my village." I asked whether something specific had happened to make him do this. "Our enemy was the Soviet invader," he explained. "But the mujahideen ended up fighting between themselves. So I went home. That was in 1983." He was also fed up, he said, with the increasingly radical Muslim character of the mujahideen organizations. "When they caught a government soldier, they killed him, and I disagreed with this practice. This was because of their fanaticism." Islam was supposed to preach tolerance and respect, he said. "The mujahideen became more and more fanatical during the war against the Soviets, and they remained so afterward, when they came to power. But they were powerless when they took over the government, because they fought with one another. And then came the Taliban."

From 1983 until a few weeks ago, Shahmurat stayed at home in his village, tending his family farm, and living simply. It was the drought of the past three years that had brought him to Taloqan, where he hoped to find work. What did he hope to do? I asked. He shrugged. "Anything," he said. "Now there is no work. The whole country is poor. The money is all with the powerful commanders." Shahmurat seemed pessimistic and woeful.

I asked him to explain all the switching of sides that we had been witnessing recently. Why did Afghans change allegiances so easily? "In America and other places," Shahmurat said, tentatively, "people have the idea that their countries are important to them. But in Afghanistan the fighters don't have this notion, and the poverty here leads them to join whoever is powerful." Shahmurat, like Ghulam Sarwar Akbari, who is his friend, blamed the foreign powers that had armed and backed various Afghan factions. "These armed organizations have been supported by foreign countries who don't care whether Afghans are educated or not, and they have pushed the fighting men to kill the educated people and those with culture. And so now there are no educated, cultured people anymore. They are either dead or in exile, and if they are still in Afghanistan they are in their homes, and have no power to speak. The gun now governs Afghanistan. In other countries, the security of the people and the property of the nation is guaranteed, and this is also so within Islam. But here these things have been destroyed. How can we change this?" Shahmurat said that he hoped for a U.N.-sponsored political solution in Afghanistan. "Perhaps, through the U.N., enlightened people can come to power in Afghanistan. When a person is thirsty, he wants water. Afghans are thirsty for unity and peace. We are sick of war." ♦



"Doesn't it seem like we just finished letting the air out of last year's tree?"

THE BENCH BURNER

How did a judge with such subversive ideas become a leading influence on American legal opinion?

BY LARISSA MacFARQUHAR

Richard Posner is introduced. He extends a limp hand, smiles tepidly, and says something polite. He is long and spare, his eyes pale as a fish, his clothing conventional, his features thin. He moves delicately, seeming to hover rather than stand: he has about him the distant, omniscient, ectoplasmic air of the butler in a haunted house. He escorts his visitor to the waiting room of his personality, where the visitor will sit, lulled by the bland ambience of the place, until it is time for murder.

It is not apparent from his mild exterior that Posner is the most mercilessly seditious legal theorist of his generation. Nor is it obvious that, as a judge on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, he is one of the most powerful jurists in the country, second only to those on the Supreme Court. He is powerful, moreover, not just by merit of his position: he is powerful because he has decided to be. In hearing a case, he doesn't first inquire into the constricting dictates of precedent; instead, he comes up with what strikes him as a sensible solution, then looks to see whether precedent excludes it. In 1991, he ruled that a group of deputy sheriffs who, without a warrant or probable cause, assisted with the seizure of a mobile home had not violated the Fourth Amendment because, rather than entering the house, they had removed it whole. (This finding was reversed unanimously by the Supreme Court, whose sarcastic opinion called it "creative.") Posner finds the rituals of the courtroom vexing impediments to the real business of punishing criminals and freeing up markets. "I'm not fully socialized into the legal profession," he says. "I'm like an imperfectly housebroken pet. I still have difficulty understanding—and this is something that most people get over in their first two weeks of law school—lawyers spouting things that they don't believe. If someone is obviously guilty, why do you have to have all this rigmarole?"

Posner did not set out to seize power: he spotted it drifting and gleefully pocketed it, like a stray hundred-dollar bill. As one of the founders of the law-and-economics movement in the nineteen-seventies, he had promoted the idea that laws should be evaluated for their consequences—economic and otherwise—as much as for their fairness, and that judges should not deliberate over rights and duties in the abstract but figure out what kind of incentives their rulings were putting in place. Now that law and economics has become part of the legal establishment, it does not seem strange when Posner talks in his opinions about markets as well as precedent. More recently, he has taken up what, in the hands of gentler souls like the philosopher Richard Rorty, is the tolerant antidoctrine of pragmatism, and made it the underpinning for his career as a flamboyantly candid judicial activist.

As much as for his contentious opinions, Posner is famous for his freakish productivity. He publishes a book every half hour. Now sixty-two, he has written thirty-one books, more than three hundred articles, and nearly nineteen hundred judicial opinions. He has written books about AIDS, law and literature, and the Clinton impeachment trial, and articles about pornography, Hegel, and medieval Iceland. This year alone, while working full time as a judge and teaching at the University of Chicago Law School, he published "Breaking the Deadlock," a book about the Bush-Gore election; a second, updated edition of his 1976 book, "Antitrust Law"; and two collections of essays. He also wrote "Public Intellectuals," a four-hundred-page diatribe against the species, and "Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy," in which, among other things, he derides democracy's anti-élitist pretensions and the animal-rights movement. He is, by a wide margin, the jurist most often cited in scholarly articles—cited almost as much as the next two, Ronald Dworkin and Oliver Wendell Holmes, added together. As Milton Friedman, the legendary Chicago economist, puts it, "He's a very brilliant fella and he's written on everything under God's green sun. What else do you want?"

If Posner is aggressively unconventional in his judging, he is ten times as much so in his books. To paraphrase an author he admires, André Gide, Posner writes not to defend himself but to be accused. This is, of course, one of the primary reasons for his fame. He began propounding the conservative economics of the Chicago School in the late nineteen-sixties, when the legal academy was almost entirely left of center; for this reason, he became the object of furious criticism even before he published his more outré theories. He relishes facts, the more obscure and counterintuitive the better, but as rhetorical weapons rather than as data. His accounts of the world are sometimes so eccentric as to be almost Martian. He has argued, for instance, that a higher proportion of black women than white women are fat because the supply of eligible black men is limited; thus, black women find the likelihood of profit from an elegant figure too small to compensate for the costs of dieting. As John Donohue, a law professor at Stanford, delicately puts it, "A little bit of empirical support goes a long way for him."

Critics find Posner exasperating, because often he simply doesn't take the trouble to answer their careful refutations. It is not that he is incapable of doing so—it is, rather, that he is more attracted to rhetoric than to proof, and believes it is more powerful. He is not, in the end, very interested in the sort of prudent rigor that produces watertight logic. He is not the type to spend years testing his arguments for leakage, sealing tiny cracks and worrying endlessly over

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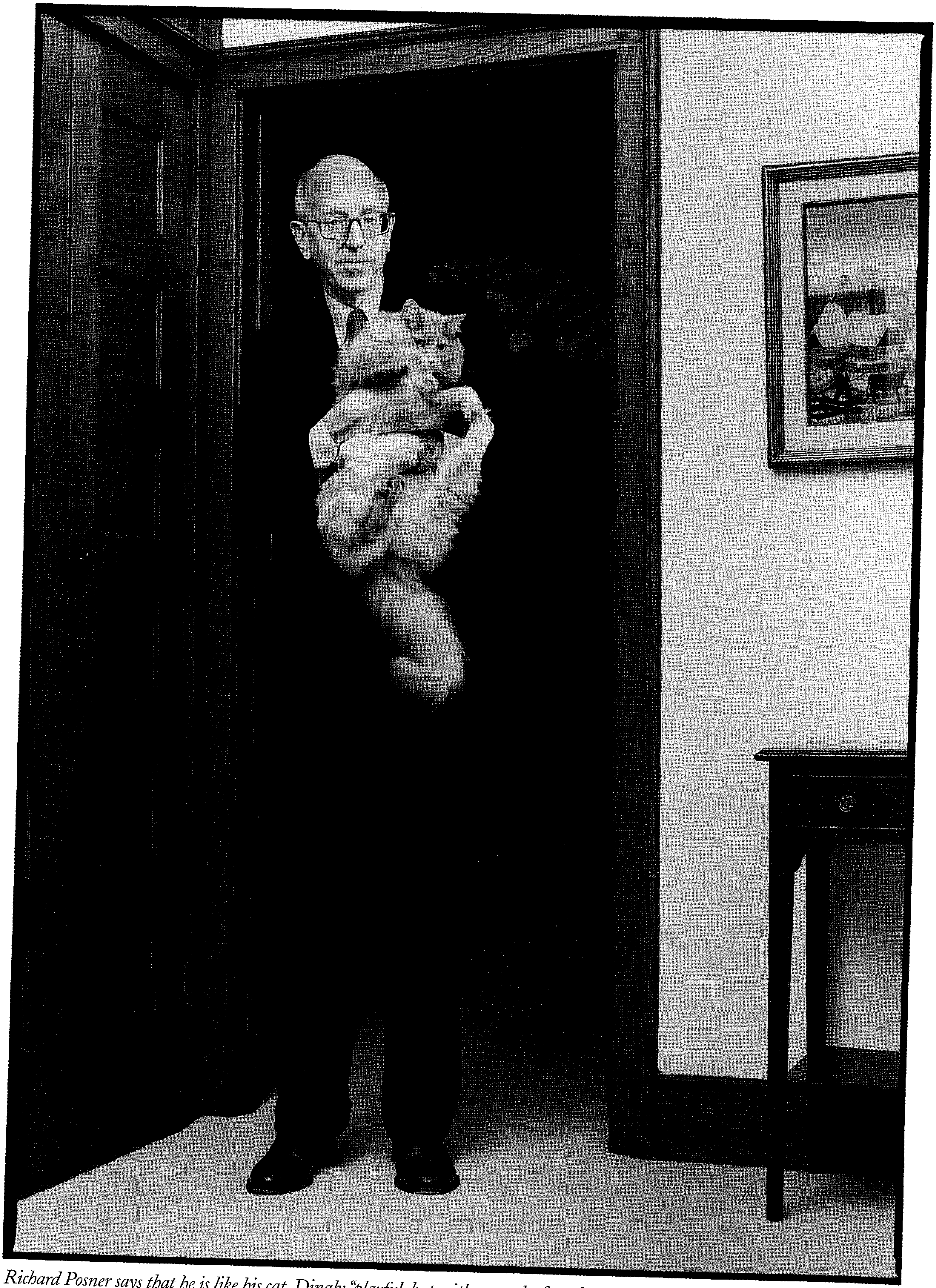


Richard Posner says that he is like his cat, Dinah: "playful, but with a streak of cruelty." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

"The Farmers' Almanac is calling for a long, hard winter."

possible ripostes: he would rather risk sending them young into the world, flawed but forceful, with the advantage of surprise. And yet the uproarious pugilism and the desire to shock evident in his pages are nowhere visible on the surface of the man. "I have exactly the same personality as my cat," Posner likes to say. "I am cold, furtive, callous, snobbish, selfish, and playful, but with a streak of cruelty."

The Dirksen Courthouse in downtown Chicago is a tall, black Mies van der Rohe building on South Dearborn, accessorized with a red metal sculpture by Alexander Calder set in the wide plaza across the street. Every weekday morning, Posner enters this sober edifice through a side door and rides up to his office, on the twenty-seventh floor, in a special judges' elevator. The judges' elevator is operated by means of an electronic I.D. card, and Posner recently discovered that the elevator can read the card through several layers of material; now he shaves nearly ten seconds off his daily routine by turning around, bending over slightly, and presenting his posterior to the card reader instead of taking out his wallet and waving the card directly.

One recent Monday, Posner arrived at the courthouse to hear six cases: a tort suit against a pharmaceutical company; a commercial case involving the right to transport gas into Indiana; a disability-benefits dispute brought by a deaf actuary; a suit filed by two brothers who claimed that a village rejected their real-estate development plans owing to the animosity of a neighbor, Mr. Funderburk; a case involving liability for damages incurred in an accident on a barge; and a rape case being tried in federal court because the events had taken place on an Indian reservation. Posner entered the courtroom and spied the small group of lawyers sitting there waiting for the day's business to begin. He was in a benign mood as he joined his two colleagues on the bench, and wondered if he had been unduly harsh with the litigants who had come before him the previous Friday. The night before, he had dreamed that he became enraged at a lawyer who had mistaken sixty thousand dollars for six thousand dollars, and rudely called him a country bumpkin.

The attorney for the plaintiff in the pharmaceutical case, Ms. Relkin, was the first to stand up. Relkin was a short, heavyset woman in a gray skirt suit who conveyed the impression that she would be hard to knock over. Her client, Mrs. Nelson, had sued the manufacturer of a drug named Parlodel, which she had taken to dry up her breast milk. Mrs. Nelson had suffered a stroke at the age of twenty-five, and claimed that it had been caused by the drug. The issue in the appeal was whether she had brought her suit within the two-year statute of limitations. Relkin claimed that at the time of the stroke there was insufficient evidence to point to Parlodel as its cause, and so the beginning of the limitations period should be pushed forward until the time when proof had presented itself. As is his wont, Posner interrupted almost immediately.

"But that can't be right," he said, in his pallid monotone. "That would extend the statute of limitations indefinitely. You're run down by a truck, and you don't know whether the truck ran you down because it was driven negligently, constructed negligently, or it was just one of those things, so you just sit around for ten years waiting for someone to tell you, 'Oh, that driver had a bad record'?"

"Certainly in that example it does get to the point of the absurd," Relkin conceded, "but that is New Jersey's law."

They argued back and forth. "Look," Posner said. "You have a twenty-five-year-old woman, she takes this medicine, she has a stroke—which is very unusual for twenty-five-year-olds—and the Physicians' Desk Reference says that there have been, I don't know, fifteen strokes, or something, resulting from the use of this drug. Why isn't that enough to put any reasonable person on notice?"

Relkin, showing signs of irritation, told him, "She spoke with her doctors . . . and they brushed it off." The two other judges looked bored. One yawned; one fiddled with his pen, laid his head back on his chair, and gazed at the ceiling. Posner, however, was enjoying himself.

"So this treating doctor calls up the fox and asks whether the fox ate the chicken," he said. "The fox says no. Now, that can't be reasonable investigation."

"Well, one would hope that a pharmaceutical company speaking to doctors prescribing the drug would be candid," Relkin protested.

"Oh, surely not!" Posner said impatiently. "Why would you expect a potential defendant to be candid? What kind of world do we live in?"

Posner has a reputation among lawyers who argue in front of him for being harsh but not nasty. He is contrasted, in this regard, with two of his colleagues on the Seventh Circuit: Frank Easterbrook, a fellow-conservative, and Ilana Rovner, who is relatively liberal. "Easterbrook is mean," one private criminal-defense attorney says. "When he hears an answer he considers stupid, he rolls his eyes and snorts." Rovner, on the other hand, is described by the lawyer as "walking emotion. She will say to the defendant, *Hello*, Mr. So-and-So, how *are* you? How is the food in the jail?" "Posner takes the Michael Corleone approach," a state attorney says. "It's business, not personal."

Posner is aware that some lawyers find his judging style difficult. In 1994, during his term as chief judge, the Chicago Council of Lawyers published an evaluation of him that was evidently the distillation of complaints from many embittered veterans of his court. The evaluation described him as frequently bored by the arguments the lawyers presented, and tending to lead the discussion in the direction of issues that interested him. It concluded, "A very substantial number of lawyers believe that Chief Judge Posner routinely does not pay sufficient attention to the facts, or leaves out crucial facts, in order to reach desired conclusions. . . . Chief Judge Posner feels less constrained by precedent, history, and the proper limits on appellate judging than, in the Council's view, he should. . . . He wrote in [his book about Benjamin] Cardozo 'the appellate judge is the central figure in Anglo-American jurisprudence.' Whether or not that claim is accurate, it is instructive as a statement of Chief Judge Posner's self-image."

The defense lawyer in the Indian rape case, the last case to be heard that morning, appeared to be around fourteen years old. He was tall and pen-shaped and wore a dark suit that looked like a school uniform. "May it please the court," he said, "my name is John Storino, and I represent the defendant and appellant, Michael A. Peters."

Storino proceeded to rehearse the details of the case. Barbara House, the complaining witness, was Peters's sister-in-law, and on the night in question she and her brother had bought two cases of beer and gone over to Peters's house to play cards. House drank about ten beers and fell asleep on the living-room floor. Two hours later, House's mother arrived and found her daughter lying unconscious on Peters's bed wearing only a shirt; Peters himself was hiding in the closet in his underwear. It was clear that the two had had sex; the question was whether House had been conscious at the time and able to give her consent.

"All right," Posner said after Storino was finished. "So what is he doing in the closet, then?"

"I would assert that there's a perfectly logical—"

"He was embarrassed," Posner said, answering for him.

"Right. His mother-in-law is knocking on the bedroom door, and it is his sister-in-law who he is—"

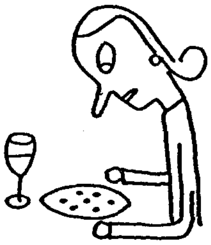
Posner interrupted him. "So you're saying she had the ten beers, she agrees to have sex, she has sex, she falls asleep, but, because of the amount of alcohol, when she wakes up she doesn't remember the sex."

"Exactly."

House herself admitted that she had no memory of the evening, but she maintained that she disliked Peters and would never have agreed to sleep with him. To counter this claim, Storino presented evidence that House frequently drove Peters to and from work and showed up with him at parties. There were no physical indications of forced sex, and Peters had had a hickey on his neck, which Storino cited as evidence that House had been a willing participant.

Mr. Gonzales, the prosecutor, stood up to make his presentation, but Posner intervened.

"The hypothesis that she consented to have sex, had sex, fell asleep, and forgot," Posner said to him. "Isn't that as plausible as the government's?"



Gonzales tried but failed to convince him otherwise.

"Really, all you have to go on, I think, is the history of animosity, and yet there may be animosity, but you'd have to call them family friends, wouldn't you?" Posner said. "They socialize together. . . . Maybe if you have ten beers in you, he looks better than he usually does."

Posner likes to take topics that are normally accorded a certain sentimental deference and treat them with jarring candor, and sex is one such topic. In 1992, he published a book called "Sex and Reason," which argued that the sex drive was subject to the control of rational calculation. The fact that sex was an instinctive urge, he claimed, did not preclude an economics of sex any more than the fact that hunger was an urge precluded a science of agriculture.

Some of Posner's conclusions in "Sex and Reason" were merely odd—he speculated, for instance, that high heels were considered sexy because they suggested that a woman was incapable of running away from her spouse—while others were contentious, such as his suggestion that normal men would rape women and seduce children if there were no laws against it (it's the ones who do it in spite of the risk of punishment who are the real weirdos). One of his most controversial recommendations was that the current adoption system be replaced by a free market in babies, which, he maintained, by offering financial incentives to biological mothers, would make both would-be parents and potential sellers better off. In "Sex and Reason," he explained that he was advocating not the selling of babies so much as the selling of parental rights—he was not, after all, suggesting that babies be sold as slaves or organ donors—but the clarification did not, somehow, have the impact of the original argument, and "baby-selling" has since become one of the primary slogans of his notoriety.

"Sex and Reason" exhibited in a particularly colorful fashion one of Posner's ongoing contradictions—that between his libertarian instincts and his attraction to the practical straightforwardness of utilitarianism. On the one hand, he declares himself a liberal of the nineteenth-century ilk—a view he summarizes, paraphrasing John Stuart Mill (in a phrase that takes on a certain je ne sais quoi in a book about sex), as "Your rights end where his nose begins." On the other hand, he argues that people's moral beliefs are the product of intractable emotions like sympathy and disgust, and so those emotions must be taken into account in a calculation of social welfare. "Disgust when sufficiently widespread," he writes, "is as solid a basis for legal regulation as tangible harm." Thus, while he talks admiringly of anti-moralistic sexual mores in Sweden, at the same time he argues that the practical fact that homophobia exists in the military is a compelling reason to exclude gay people.

In "Sex and Reason," Posner was interested in conscious sexual choices, but he is also committed to a theory of unconscious rationality: sociobiology. He is a thoroughgoing Darwinian, and believes that many of the social and moral ideas commonly held to be cultural are in fact traceable to the dictates of reproduction. He subscribes to the idea, for instance, that altruism derives from the evolutionary imperative to perpetuate one's genes by taking care of those who share them. This coheres nicely with his general economic approach. As he puts it, "Economic theory is closely related to the theory of evolution. . . . Evolution deals with unconscious maximizers, the genes; economics with conscious maximizers, persons."

Sociobiology might seem to be an odd idea for a libertarian to be attracted to—most libertarians are committed, after all, to the idea that human choices are freely made rather than determined by forces beyond conscious control—but Posner does not feel a sentimental attachment to the idea of freedom. He is a libertarian of an instrumental, utilitarian sort: he simply believes that libertarian policies, in social life as in markets, will tend to maximize wealth and happiness. Liberty, for him, is a pragmatic principle, not a moral one.

Posner lives in a comfortable, medium-sized house in Hyde Park, a few blocks from the university campus, with his wife, Charlene, and their cat, Dinah. The house is furnished unobtrusively: the living-room sofas and chairs are upholstered in brown and mustard; the floors were for several decades covered with a wall-to-wall carpet of forest green, until, a few months ago, Posner and Charlene decided to exchange the carpet for wood floors and Oriental rugs. Charlene is reserved and competent, her habitual expression a watchful half smile that suggests that she has views but will offer them only if asked to do so. With wide-lensed glasses, chin-length brown hair, and dirndl skirts, she still looks like the Radcliffe girl that she is, class of 1960. Dinah is a gray Maine coon cat, whose chilly temperament is for Posner a continual source of suffering.

"My cat doesn't like me," he says mournfully. "This cat, to whom I am slavishly devoted. She tolerates me, she's polite, but she clearly prefers Charlene. She regards me as a servant. I feed her, I brush her, I clean the kitty-litter box, I shower her with endearments—I've even started taking her to the vet to try to bond with her. Charlene says that I love Dinah more than anything human, but that is false." Posner has resigned himself to loving Dinah in the self-abasing tradition of courtly love, the object forever unattainable.

Posner loves cute animals of all kinds, except dogs. He dislikes dogs partly out of a sense of duty—he feels that, given his commitment to cats, it would not be quite proper for him to like dogs as well. But it is also the canine personality that he finds distasteful. Years ago, when he and Charlene lived in Washington, they owned a Norwegian elkhound of servile disposition, poignantly misnamed Fang; whenever anyone evinced the slightest displeasure with him, Fang's lips would tremble with anxiety, and Posner found this irritating. Posner is an ardent fan of monkeys, his instinctive attraction perhaps bolstered by his sociobiological sense that monkeys are basically humans with fewer affectations. A couple of years ago, he watched a nature program about baboons, and found them so delightful that he decided to call the zoo and adopt one.

Posner spends weekday mornings in the courthouse, and in the afternoons he goes home to write. His study is a crowded but orderly room on the second floor. On the mantelpiece, he has placed a small framed photograph of Dinah and a couple of pictures of his children, Eric and Kenneth. (Eric is also a law professor at Chicago who writes about law and economics; Kenneth is a securities analyst in New York.) Next to these stands a photograph, which Posner cut out of a magazine and framed, of a hairy Syrian hamster standing on its hind legs in a posture that reminds Posner of the "Winged Victory of Samothrace," in the Louvre. On the top of one of his bookshelves stands a plywood scale that the economist George Stigler made and gave to him twenty years ago, when Posner became a judge: in one pan of the scale is a small wooden block labelled "Justice"; in the other pan is a larger, heavier block labelled "Efficiency."

Posner doesn't like to waste time, so he sticks to a routine (he calls himself "rigid and Germanic"). But it is not just his regular habits that allow him to be as productive as he is: he has structured his life so as to free his mind from any distractions whatsoever. Charlene is in charge of all the domestic arrangements: Posner describes their relationship as the traditional Jewish one, in which the pasty-faced scholar husband stays home and studies while the wife attends to worldly activities. Until a few weeks ago, Posner had never used an A.T.M.—when he needed cash, he took it from Charlene's wallet.

Charlene does all the cooking except for a little meal that Posner makes every Friday night: for an appetizer, he puts together a plate of smoked salmon, chopped onion, capers, and lemon; for the main course, shrimp cocktail, he mixes a sauce that consists of mayonnaise, some cocktail sauce for color, a little sugar, a drop of Worcestershire sauce, and (the secret ingredient) two teaspoons of sherry. (He has never made this sauce for guests, because he worries that the proportions aren't linear, and that it would go wrong if he attempted to make it for more than two people.) Posner rarely goes abroad for vacation. He is a cautious tourist, he says, prone to anxieties about foreign thieves and muggers. He likes visiting Switzerland, although, he says, "I understand that sophisticated people find it boring." He stopped watching television a day or two after the World Trade Center collapsed, lest speculations about future attacks make him a nervous flier.

Half a dozen times a year, Posner and Charlene will have people over for dinner—often the Chicago economist William Landes, Posner's best friend, and his wife—but, on the whole, Posner prefers to avoid social life. "People don't say interesting things," he says. "A lot of socializing is just dull—I'd rather read a book. I have a friend, an economist who's Swedish, and he told me that Sweden has terrible television, so people there spend their time visiting each other. But that's worse, because when you watch television you get some information, you even get some moral instruction, you learn to be nice to single mothers or what have you, but socializing, particularly family—well, that is deadly. When you're just talking with your friends about trivia, what's the point?"

Posner is content with his life. He doesn't want any more money, and he has been happily married for thirty-nine years, since shortly after he first spotted Charlene in a housedress taking out her garbage. When asked if he has any regrets, he pauses for a minute to think, and then says he wishes that he hadn't wasted so much time going to movies in college. "I'm not any kind of genius or anything," he says. "I went to college early"—at the age of sixteen, to Yale—"so I've had a lot of years of working, but I think I needed that. If I'd had more interests or activities and lost that work time, I think my career would have suffered."

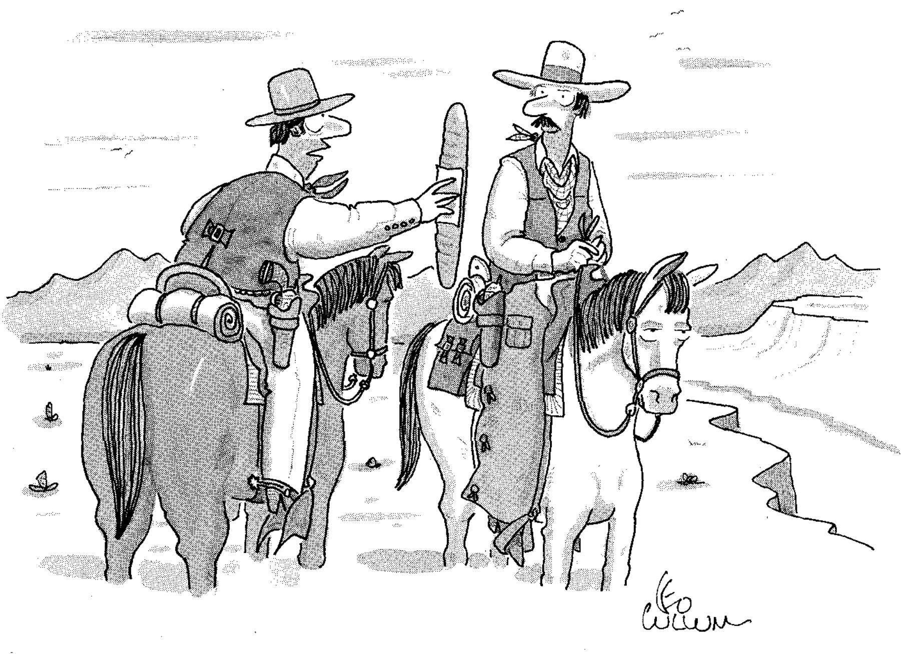
Posner is content, as it happens, but content isn't what he set out to be. One reason he could never be a liberal (in the current sense of the word) is that, like many conservatives, he finds the idea of ordinary happiness uninspiring. He has no interest in a politics whose goal is to give people shelter and enough to eat. He loves fierceness and glory and heroism. When he looks into the future, he sees a rationalized, disenchanted world—a Scandinavian-style utopia in which people are dull and sated and genius has disappeared from the earth. "No sane person," he says, "not even I, would, for the sake of aesthetics, try to restore the Athenian slave state, the High Renaissance, the Russian Revolution, world wars, et cetera. The price is too high. But life will lack risk and savor."

Posner grew up in New York—first in Manhattan and then in Scarsdale. His mother's relatives were Jews from Vienna who looked down on his father's family, which was from Romania and poorer than they were. "They were all poor," Posner says, "but my mother's family had toilet paper, and my father's family had newspaper." His mother was a Communist and was friendly with the family that adopted the Rosenberg children. The day Stalin died was a day of mourning in the Posner household. Posner's mother taught in the New York City public schools. His father had a checkered career: as a young man, he worked in a jewelry business with some cousins; then, having attended law school at night, he became a criminal-defense lawyer. After the Second World War, he became a moneylender, specializing in second mortgages in New York slums; he was so successful at this that he bought a Cadillac and, in 1948, moved his family to Scarsdale.

When Posner grew more conservative (he thought of himself as a liberal until he was thirty or so), his mother was horrified. "We had terrible fights," he says. "I became really furious at her. See, she was one of these bright fools, my mother—quite a bright person, but very limited. The other thing that annoyed me about her was that I worried about her politics interfering with my career. Every time I got a government job, I always felt obligated to tell the authorities that I had this mother who had probably been a Communist. It was an annoying piece of baggage. Then eventually she became senile and forgot about politics and actually became very benign. Both Charlene and I breathed a sigh of relief." Looking back on his red-diaper childhood, Posner considers his parents hypocrites. "It was just talk," he says of their radicalism. "They wanted me to live the same conventional life that they lived."

Both Posner's parents lived into their nineties. "My mother, in the course of her decline, broke her hip," Posner says. "In the olden days, people broke their hips and died, which was great; now they fix them." After his mother broke her hip, his father found it difficult to take care of her, so his parents moved to assisted-living facilities in Chicago. When his father grew very frail and sick, Posner asked the gerontologist what the point of keeping him alive with all these procedures was; the doctor informed him that termination of care had to be voluntary. "Because my father was more or less compos mentis and wanted treatment, you couldn't deny it," Posner says. "Growing up the way he did, struggling the way he did, the notion of giving up, not fighting to the end, was anathema to him. I hope my generation can be a little more rational about this. I'd like to choose my own time of exit.

"I don't know if this is true of everybody," Posner says, "but I loved my parents when I was growing up and they were really the sort of parents you should



"Take this, Luke. They say it's impossible to get a decent baguette west of the Pecos."

be grateful to—my mother gave me great cultural enrichment, and my father helped me buy our first house, so they were ideal parents. But my thoughts about them are dominated by their old age. I don't make allowances: when I think about them, there's no affection. Charlene thinks I'm a little bit unnatural about my family. But so many people have these decrepit, horrible old parents, and then they're so upset when they die at ninety, and regard it as a medical failure that the doctors didn't do this and didn't do that. My father was even annoyed when my mother died—he thought the doctors hadn't tended her carefully enough—though by the time she died she couldn't speak, she couldn't use her hands, she wasn't human. And it's not as if you had a cute animal with the same mental ability—when you see human beings like that, you don't think, Well, she's on the level of a chipmunk." Asked what he felt when both his parents had died, he looked puzzled, as though the question didn't make sense to him. "I don't have any feeling about it," he said.

Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher at the University of Chicago and a friend of Posner's, believes that his upbringing and his pious, Communist mother are the reason that he is now repelled by moralism of any kind, and takes refuge in literature. He loves scandalous, immoralist writers such as Stendhal and Gide, and, indeed, the world of French novels is in many ways more congenial to Posner's caustic temperament, and to an economic, self-interested view of human nature, than that of the law. (It should be noted that he is not an aesthetic snob, however: among his favorite movies are those starring Meg Ryan and a more obscure work entitled "That Darn Cat.")

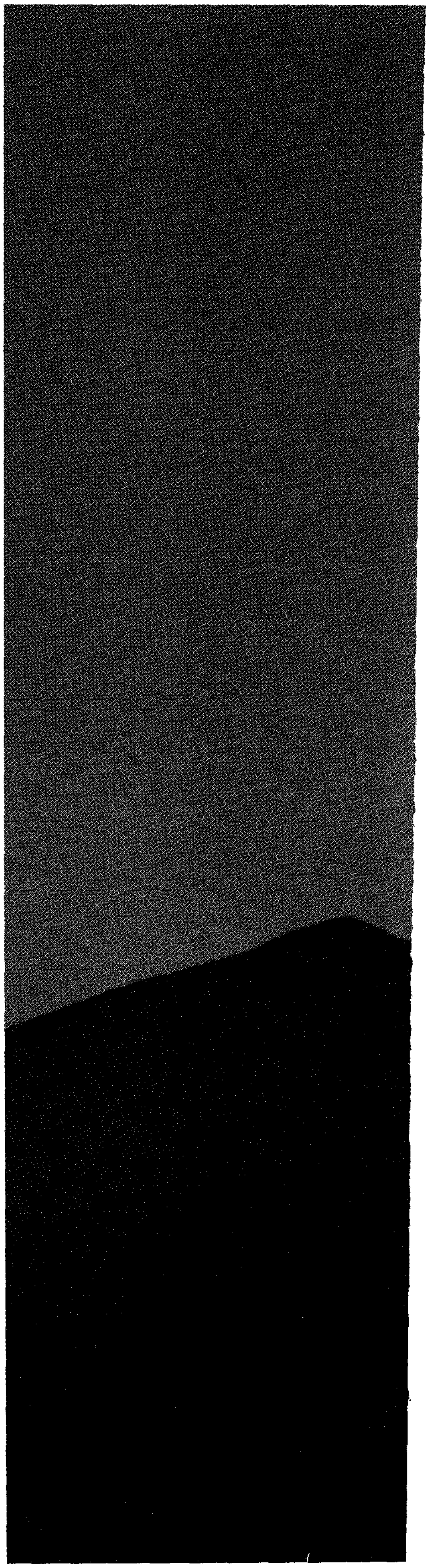
Posner is as much aesthete as analyst; more than a clever rebuttal he relishes mastery of tone. One of his favorite terms of abuse is "maladroit." He appreciates the lumbering, earnest activist only as a comic character, and he is positively allergic to rectitude. "Some people take pride in being 'good,' which is to say better than most other people," he writes. "But that is pride rather than morality. It is related to the striving for status."

What Posner really despises, though, is, as he sees it, the whining, sanctimonious pedantry of moral philosophers. Asking oneself whether one's beliefs are justified, he feels, is an esoteric, self-indulgent business, practiced only by those safely ensconced in tenure. Ordinary people are unreflective, simply believing whatever they believe; moreover, moral reflection has never persuaded anyone to change his mind or pursue one course of action over another, and thus is a deluded and useless activity. "Knowing the moral thing to do," he writes, "furnishes no motive, and creates no motivation, for doing it." (The contention that no one has ever been persuaded by a moral argument, and that non-philosophers never question their beliefs, strikes his philosophical critics as so obviously wrong that they have tended to throw up their hands rather than rebut it.) Posner contrasts the academic philosopher with what he calls "moral entrepreneurs," such as Martin Luther King or the feminist Catharine MacKinnon (whom Posner admires despite disagreeing with her politics): those who, through sheer charisma and rhetorical force, sweep people headlong out of their accustomed inertia and inspire new moralities altogether.

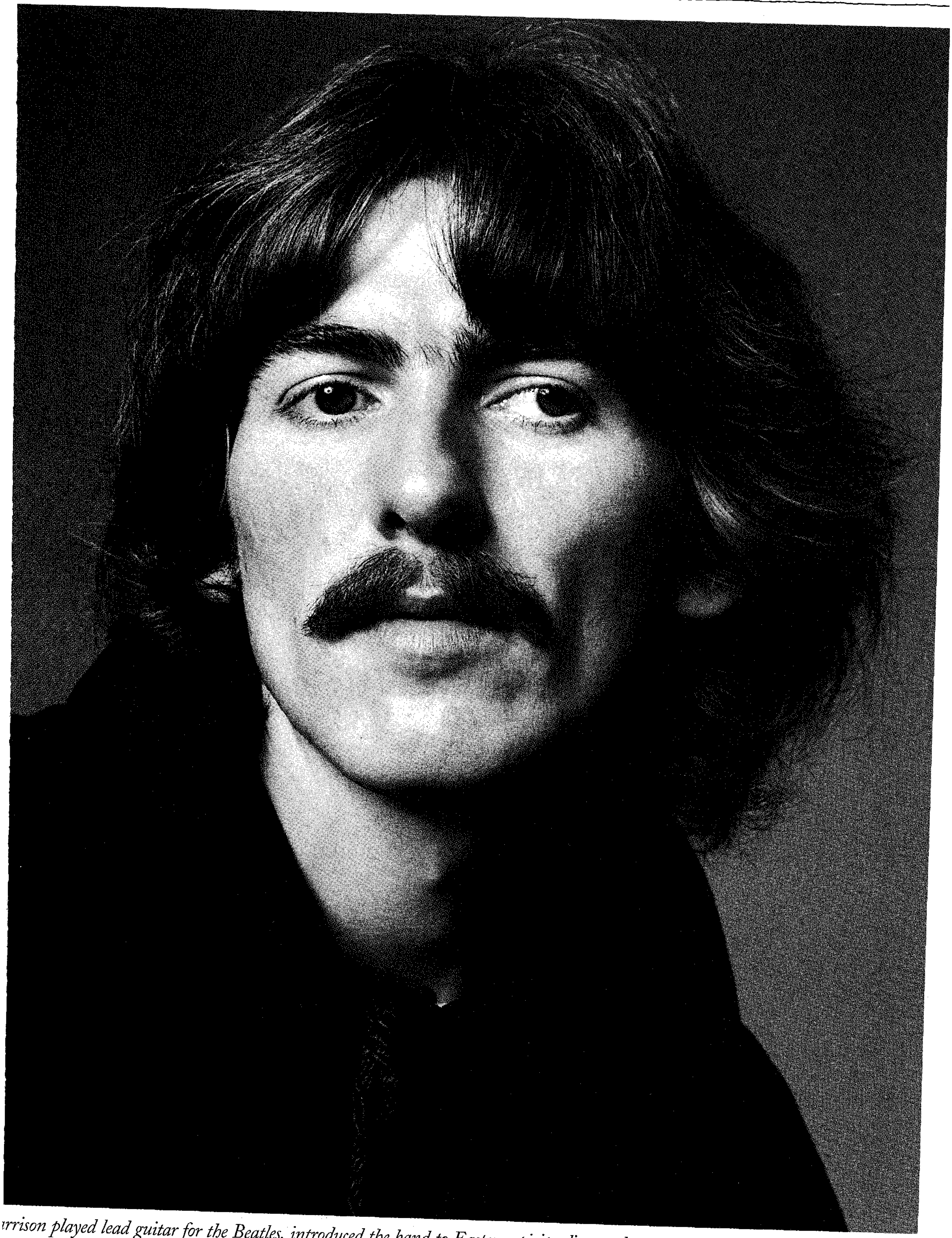
At Yale, Posner majored in English. He studied with Cleanth Brooks, and wrote his senior thesis on Yeats's late poetry. He still knows many of Yeats's poems by heart, and uses them as templates for "sizing" his own reactions to life's events. Thinking about careerism, for instance, calls to his mind this passage from "The Choice":

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life, or of the work,
> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

Posner says that he has always liked Yeats because Yeats is a "full-fledged Nietzschean." Nietzsche is perhaps the philosopher who has had the deepest influence on Posner. Posner takes from him a conception of morality (made by humans, not found in the world), a conception of ethics (tenth-hand bromides, clung to by those lacking the courage or imagination to think for themselves), and, most of all, an intellectual temperament (delighting in muscular language and the power to shock). Explaining his attraction to Nietzsche, he



PORTRAIT BY RICHARD AVEDON *Geo*
Comes the Sun," but his finest moment was



rrison played lead guitar for the Beatles, introduced the band to Eastern spirituality, and wrote such songs as "Taxman" and "Here album "All Things Must Pass," released in 1970. Last week, Harrison himself passed, at fifty-eight. He is pictured here in 1967.

"Little bastard played you like a video game."

• •

says, "The idea—a bit banal, I'm afraid, when stated in summary form—is that a person is responsible for his own life. External forces and events are just the raw materials out of which we make a life, and we have no right to blame anyone else for the result because it was ours to make or muff. This is a philosophy, or a psychology, basically optimistic, cheerful, and forward-looking, of self-assertion, of liberation from oppressive frameworks such as that created by religion or other dogmas."

After college, Posner briefly considered going to graduate school in English literature but decided to go to Harvard Law School instead. There he earned the lasting enmity of the authorities by inviting, to the *Harvard Law Review's* seventy-fifth-anniversary dinner, a speaker who had written a luridly malicious review of a book by one of Posner's professors. (Posner thought he would be entertaining.) Years later, Posner was approached for a job by the Stanford and Yale law schools but not by Harvard.

At the time Posner graduated from law school, and, indeed, until the end of the nineteen-sixties, he still considered himself a liberal Democrat. He voted for Kennedy, Johnson, and Humphrey (since then he has voted Republican). He clerked for Supreme Court Justice William Brennan. (Once, misunderstanding his instructions, he wrote up an opinion arguing the reverse of Brennan's decision; it was so compelling that Brennan and the Court changed their minds and adopted it.) Following his clerkship, he went to work for the Federal Trade Commission, and then served as an assistant to Thurgood Marshall when Marshall was Solicitor General.

Toward the end of the sixties, however, Posner began to move to the right, because he disliked the disorder of the student riots. Then, in 1968, while he was teaching at Stanford, he met two conservative economists from the University of Chicago, Aaron Director and George Stigler. Having been raised to believe that conservatives were evil, Posner was surprised to discover that he liked these economists. He concluded, first, that politics and personality had nothing to do with each other, and then, as he became more interested in economics, he found that he agreed with them. He moved to the University of Chicago the next year.

Around the same time, Gary Becker, another Chicago economist, who later won the Nobel Prize, published an article analyzing the effects that particular laws had on the behavior of criminals, assuming the criminals were rational. When Posner read Becker's article, it was clear to him that not only criminal law but all law created incentives for people to act in certain ways. Law didn't just show up after the game was over, patting backs and slapping wrists—it set the rules and assigned the penalties that determined how the game was played in the first place. Surely, then, the important thing was to figure out what kind of game these rules and penalties were producing in practice. Why, Posner wondered, did judges talk so much about precedent and fairness rather than about real-world consequences, as though their only responsibility were to "the law" in the abstract—as though law existed in a sealed-off realm separate from life?

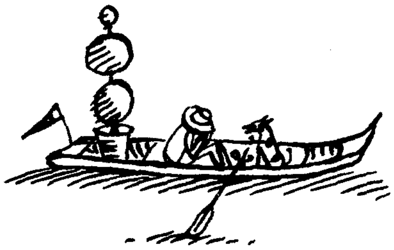
Posner also became aware of another, even more famous article, which argued for a consequence-oriented approach to civil law—"The Problem of Social Cost," published in 1960 by Ronald Coase, another Chicago economist and Nobel Prize winner. Suppose, Coase's argument suggested, that a railroad runs next to a farmer's field and that trains emit sparks that destroy the crops nearest the track. Suppose, too, that it would cost the railroad a hundred dollars to install a mechanism to prevent the sparks from flying, but the ruined crops are worth only fifty dollars to the farmer. Traditionally, a legal thinker might consider this a case of conflicting property rights, and would decide that the railroad's right to full use of the track trumped the farmer's right to full use of his land, or vice versa, leaving the loser worse off. But, Coase pointed out, it would be more efficient for the railroad to pay the farmer, say, sixty dollars for a right to emit sparks: that way the railroad would pay out sixty dollars instead of the hundred dollars it would have cost to install anti-spark mechanisms, and the farmer would profit sixty dollars from the land rather than fifty, and both would be better off. Coase's article showed that it made sense to think of rights not in terms of moral desert but in terms of property.

As Posner and others began to look into the way that law worked and the consequences it had produced in the past, they discovered a strange phenomenon: although the judges whose collective decisions made up the common law had mostly talked about rights and duties, in practice they had decided their cases as though they were trying to bring about the outcome that a free market would have produced. In, say, the case of the railroad and the farmer, a judge might think that he was balancing competing rights; but, more often than not, the decision he made would turn out to be the same as the one that an economist like Coase would have advocated. It came to seem to Posner as though economic efficiency were a hidden force that had driven law for centuries. Law had imagined that it stood above markets, imposing upon them its own notions of fairness and duty; but, all along, the pull of the market was stronger, shaping judges' ideas without their knowing it, and making economists of them while they thought they were in another business altogether.

Now that Posner is so influential, his description of the law has become self-fulfilling: these days, many judges think like economists because Posner has told them to. But one of the most striking instances of a judge thinking like an economist before Posner came along was that of Learned Hand deciding United States v. Carroll Towing Company, in 1947. The case involved a boat that, through want of supervision, had been allowed to crash into another boat. In order to decide who should be held liable, Hand came up with a formula dictating that a person should be considered negligent only if the amount he had spent on precautions against an accident was less than the probability of the accident's occurring, multiplied by the accident's cost. A person should not be expected, in other words, to bankrupt himself installing every possible safety device; he should be responsible only for making a sensible calculation that balanced cost-effective caution and risk. (Guido Calabresi, who is now, like Posner, a federal appeals judge, published an article in 1961 arguing, in a similar vein, that courts should endeavor to minimize the cost of accidents to society by holding liable the party who could have avoided the accident most cheaply. This article was one of the most important in the inception of law and economics, along with those of Becker and Coase.)

The law was, then, already closely aligned with Posner's Chicago School free-market principles, but there were still areas of inefficiency that Posner felt were in need of correction: antitrust law, for example. Were antitrust laws, he wondered, really preventing market-restricting practices like price-fixing? Or were they themselves restricting the market by harassing companies with needless rules? Posner's skepticism about antitrust legislation had an enormous impact, and led to his being appointed, in 1999, a mediator in the government's antitrust lawsuit against Microsoft. (It was hoped that Posner would be acceptable to both sides—to Microsoft because of his hostility to antitrust law, and to the government because of his hostility to cartel-like behavior that threatened a free market.) Other ideas in the same vein were less influential. For instance, Posner argued against the notion that racial discrimination was bound to give way because it was economically inefficient. Some discrimination could be rational, he maintained, because it lowered the cost of gathering information: if an employer believed a race to be generally correlated with undesirable characteristics, then discriminating against members of that race was no less sensible than discriminating against a brand of toothpaste because of a bad experience with one tube.

It was not until Posner started writing dozens of articles on the economic approach to law that it began to have a real impact. He published the famous "Economic Analysis of Law" in 1973 (now in its fifth edition), which established law and economics as a field in its own right. Law and economics became so prevalent as a component of antitrust litigation that in 1977 Posner, along with his friends William Landes and Andrew Rosenfield, decided to form a consulting company, Lexecon, that would advise law firms and corporations on economic issues. The company was extremely successful, and provided Posner with a significant income until he was compelled to give up his stake in it, upon his assumption of the judgeship, in 1981.



In recent years, Posner has more or less confined himself to the question of what effects a law is likely to produce, but at one time he had a more ambitious mission. Twenty years ago, he argued that free markets were not just useful tools for producing wealth but also morally valuable because they distributed goods to those who most wanted them, as measured by the price they were willing to pay. He was immediately attacked by a number of people, notably the legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin. It was pointed out that willingness to pay a high price for something did not indicate desire so much as wealth; and that, furthermore, according to Posner's logic, a person with no money deserved nothing, regardless of how his poverty came about. On this point, Posner, uncharacteristically, conceded.

Having written on every subject in the universe, Posner is invited to speak at all sorts of occasions, not only by large law schools but also by dozens of obscure associations and sub-associations and societies of narrow purpose. At the annual meeting of the American Bar Association, in particular, Posner is everywhere in demand, and when the meeting is held in Chicago, as it was this year, he feels it would be churlish to turn down too many invitations. Thus, when the week of the conference rolled around, he donned a gray suit and a plaid tie, collected his decrepit straw hat for the protection of his skin against the sun, and braced himself for several days of tediously fulsome introductions, book signings, posing for cameras (his fans often ask to be photographed with him), and requests for him to speak in strange and unappealing places like Brazil. The first group he had agreed to address called itself Scribes. Posner had never heard of

Scribes, but he approved of its mission—the encouragement of stylish writing on legal subjects—so he had accepted its invitation to lunch.

Posner's sense of the importance of legal rhetoric was rather more extensive, however, than that of the Scribes fellows nostalgic for a more ornamental era. In his book about the Bush-Gore election, for instance, Posner claimed that the main problem with the Supreme Court's decision favoring Bush was its rhetorical incompetence. It was the pragmatically correct verdict because it averted the danger of a political crisis, but the judges were at fault for failing to cloak their obviously pragmatic decree in convincing legal jargon. Posner delights in the brinkmanship of clever rhetoric. The trick, he feels, is to be as frank as possible about the pragmatic motives behind a decision, while clothing them in just enough formalist legal language to enable the decision to pass as a legitimate judicial move. In an ideal world, Posner believes, everyone would be as pragmatic about justice as he is, and judges would be able to be brazenly candid about their reasoning, as was his hero, Oliver Wendell Holmes; meanwhile, though, rhetoric is fun.

For the past ten years or so, Posner has called himself a pragmatist, meaning that he believes that there is no objective way to choose between incompatible moral positions. Pragmatism has a bracingly impious air that he finds exhilarating. "Politics is about enmity," he says. "It's about getting together with your friends and knocking off your enemies. The basic fallacy of liberalism is the idea that if we get together with reasonable people we can agree on everything. But you can't agree: strife is ineradicable, a fundamental part of nature, in storms and in human relations."

Posner likes to argue that judges do not confront moral issues—only questions of strategy. He claims, for instance, that in Brown v. Board of Education the Court made its decision against segregation on the purely instrumental ground that segregation had been found to injure black students' self-esteem—though most people would view the decision that black self-esteem was a consideration of legal relevance as a moral one, and by no means uncontroversial in 1954. It is one of Posner's most persistent and confounding convictions that it is possible to practice a purely "pragmatic" jurisprudence. He argues that since there is no objective way to discover the definitive meaning of an ambiguous law, judges should ignore highfalutin morality talk and simply make decisions based on what is sensible and conducive to social welfare—disregarding the obvious fact that deciding what is sensible and conducive to social welfare is a controversial business in which moral principles are inevitably at stake. This problem has been pointed out to Posner many times, and he has conceded it many times, but he always slides back again into his old ways.

For years, Posner had no solution, but recently he has been reading Carl Schmitt, and he has now come up with one. Schmitt was an early-twentieth-century German political theorist who believed that there is no objective way to settle moral or political disputes because all beliefs are the beliefs of a particular *Volk*, or cultural group, and there is no such thing as a universal rationality capable of mediating between them. Schmitt concluded that the only way to insure stability was to extract from society people whose beliefs were incompatible with those of the majority, and he used this argument to support Nazism's expulsion of Jews from the judiciary. While this scandalous pedigree lends Schmitt's theory, for Posner, a certain frisson, Posner himself uses Schmitt's logic to argue for the opposite conclusions.

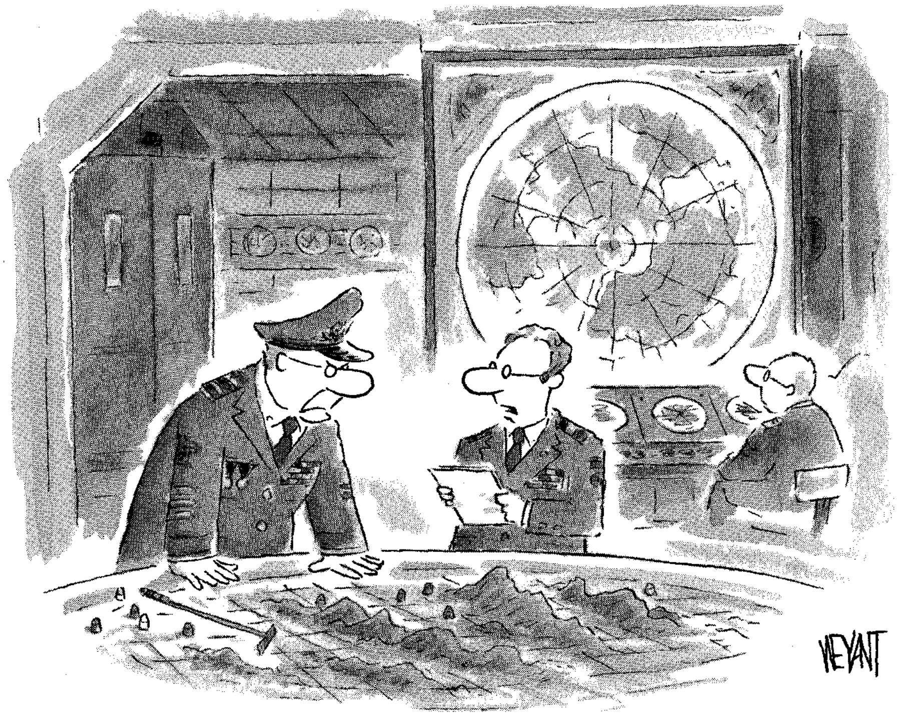
In the book that he is now writing, "Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy," Posner argues that, since America contains so many irreconcilable points of view, and since it is hopeless to try to assimilate these points of view into one harmonious legal philosophy, the solution is to insure that the different points of view are represented in different judges. (In this way, oddly, both Schmitt and Posner are espousing a version of multiculturalism: they believe that different populations will always have different points of view, and that universal rationality is a myth.) One individual judge, Posner reasons, will never be able to put aside his personal disgusts and instincts, so the trick is to have lots of different judges whose instincts clash, and hope that, in the end, their views will cancel out in such a way as to approximate fairness. Of course, this is not a philosophy to comfort any particular defendant facing a

"Wings that don't work! Harps we can't play! And these infuriating nighties! Are you sure this isn't Hell?"

hostile reception; but that, Posner believes, is just the nature of life in a diverse society, and covering it up with a lot of obscurantist talk about liberal principles will not, in the end, make any difference.

Scribes turned out to be rather a fringe affair, the promotion of belletristic aspirations not being much of a priority in the law business; the lunch, accordingly, was held in a small room in a difficult-to-locate minor wing of the Hotel Inter-Continental. Hovering palely behind the lectern, Posner regarded his small audience without expression. There was an old Jewish joke, he told them, that summed up his views of judicial writing—and of law in general, for that matter—quite well. A man walks through a ghetto in Eastern Europe and spies a mohel's shopwindow (a mohel, Posner explained, is a person who performs circumcisions). He notices to his surprise that the window is full of watches. The man asks the mohel, "Why the watches?" and the mohel says, "Well, what would you like me to put there?"

Watches, Posner explained, wrinkling his nose ever so slightly, is what most of legal talk consists of—jargon, boilerplate, and patriotic flourishes. If only judges were bold enough to be candid—if only they would stop spouting pious rubbish about ethics and start talking about how the world really works—then they would take down the watches and fill their shopwindows with something else.



"Nothing yet, sir, but we have found Elvis."

• •

One Sunday morning in the early fall, Posner and Charlene took their four-year-old grandson, Nathaniel, to the zoo. Nathaniel had an appointment in the early afternoon, so Posner was eager to get to the zoo first thing, in order not to be short of time. He allowed, however, rather too much time, and so even though he absent-mindedly drove past the entrance and quite a long way into town before he noticed, he, Charlene, and Nathaniel still arrived forty-five minutes before the zoo opened. It was raining hard, so they first sat in the car and then, when that got too depressing, huddled, shivering, under the eaves of the ticket booth until the gates were unlocked.

It was not, truth be told, the first time that Posner had felt cold-shouldered by the zoo. When his baboon-adoption materials arrived in the mail, they had contained not a picture of his baboon but only a postcard of a generic baboon. Posner discovered to his dismay that he had not, in fact, adopted a particular baboon but, instead, had contributed to a general fund, which entitled him only to part of a baboon, in a kind of time-sharing arrangement. Upon learning this, he had felt infantilized and perhaps even a little deceived by the zoo, but then he put these feelings aside and made inquiries about adopting a whole animal.

When the zoo opened, Posner, Charlene, and Nathaniel made their way to the monkey house. Inside, it was cavernous and steamy, and monkeys of varying species sat or screeched or leaped about. Posner's attention was caught by a pair of small black monkeys who were batting at each other while swinging from branch to branch with one paw. Posner, who is physically cautious, a slow crosser of streets, watched them for a minute, then turned anxiously to Charlene. "They might get hurt, horsing around like that," he said. "One of them might fall."

"They're *monkeying* around," Charlene corrected.

"I want to be a monkey," Nathaniel said.

When they left the monkey house, it was raining harder than ever. Still, having come all that way, Posner felt he should pay a visit to the baboons. The baboons were housed in a fenced-in area, in the center of which stood a large rock, pocked with shallow caves. Most were huddled inside the caves, away from the rain, but three baboons were sitting side by side on an exposed branch, perfectly still, enduring the weather in silence. Why? Posner mused, fascinated by the sight, which appeared to defy even the most minimal dictates of rationality. Did they *like* the rain? he wondered. They didn't look as if they liked it. Were they too stupid to move? Were they being punished in some way? Or were they, perhaps, conducting this bitter vigil in the service of some impenetrable simian stoicism? What if one of the stupid or criminal or stoical baboons turned out to be his baboon? Posner stood for a minute more, peering at the dripping, motionless trio on the branch, then turned away, baffled. ♦

FICTION

SURROUNDED BY SLEEP

BY AKHIL SHARMA

One August afternoon, when Ajay was ten years old, his elder brother, Aman, dove into a pool and struck his head on the cement bottom. For three minutes, he lay there unconscious. Two boys continued to swim, kicking and splashing, until finally Aman was spotted below them. Water had entered through his nose and mouth. It had filled his stomach. His lungs collapsed. By the time he was pulled out, he could no longer think, talk, chew, or roll over in his sleep.

Ajay's family had moved from India to Queens, New York, two years earlier. The accident occurred during the boys' summer vacation, on a visit with their aunt and uncle in Arlington, Virginia. After the accident, Ajay's mother came to Arlington, where she waited to see if Aman would recover. At the hospital, she told the doctors and nurses that her son had been accepted into the Bronx High School of Science, in the hope that by highlighting his intelligence she would move them to make a greater effort on his behalf. Within a few weeks of the accident, the insurance company said that Aman should be transferred to a less expensive care facility, a long-term one. But only a few of these were any good, and those were full, and Ajay's mother refused to move Aman until a space opened in one of them. So she remained in Arlington, and Ajay stayed, too, and his father visited from Queens on the weekends when he wasn't working. Ajay was enrolled at the local public school and in September he started fifth grade.

Before the accident, Ajay had never prayed much. In India, he and his brother used to go with their mother to the temple every Tuesday night, but that was mostly because there was a good *dosa* restaurant nearby. In America, his family went to a temple only on important holy days and birthdays. But shortly after Ajay's mother came to Arlington, she moved into the room that he and his brother had shared during the summer and made an altar in a corner. She threw an old flowered sheet over a cardboard box that had once held a television. On top, she put a clay lamp, an incense-stick holder, and postcards depicting various gods. There was also a postcard of Mahatma Gandhi. She explained to Ajay that God could take any form; the picture of Mahatma Gandhi was there because he had appeared to her in a dream after the accident and told her that Aman would recover and become a surgeon. Now she and Ajay prayed for at least half an hour before the altar every morning and night.

At first, she prayed with absolute humility. "Whatever you do will be good because you are doing it," she murmured to the postcards of Ram and Shivaji, daubing their lips with water and rice. Mahatma Gandhi got only water, because he did not like to eat. As weeks passed and Aman did not recover in time to return to the Bronx High School of Science for the first day of classes, his mother began doing things that called attention to her piety. She sometimes held the prayer lamp until it blistered her palms. Instead of kneeling before the altar, she lay face down. She fasted twice a week. Her attempts to sway God were not so different from Ajay's performing somersaults to amuse his aunt, and they made God seem human to Ajay.

One morning, as Ajay knelt before the altar, he traced an Om, a crucifix, and a Star of David into the pile of the carpet. Beneath these, he traced an "S," for Superman, inside an upside-down triangle. His mother came up beside him.

"What are you praying for?" she asked. She had her hat on, a thick gray knitted one that a man might wear. The tracings went against the weave of the carpet and were darker than the surrounding nap. Pretending to examine them, Ajay leaned forward and put his hand over the "S." His mother did not mind the Christian and Jewish symbols—they were for commonly recognized gods, after all—but she could not tolerate his praying to Superman. She'd caught him doing so once, several weeks earlier, and had become very angry, as if Ajay's faith in Superman made her faith in Ram ridiculous. "Right in front of God," she had said several times.

Ajay, in his nervousness, spoke the truth. "I'm asking God to give me a hundred per cent on the math test."

His mother was silent for a moment. "What if God says you can have the math grade but then Aman will have to be sick a little while longer?" she asked.

Ajay kept quiet. He could hear cars on the road outside. He knew that his mother wanted to bewail her misfortune before God so that God would feel guilty. He looked at the postcard of Mahatma Gandhi. It was a black-and-white photo of him walking down a city street with an enormous crowd trailing behind him. Ajay thought of how, before the accident, Aman had been so modest that he would not leave the bathroom until he was fully dressed. Now he had rashes on his penis from the catheter that drew his urine into a translucent bag hanging from the guardrail of his bed.

His mother asked again,"Would you say, 'Let him be sick a little while longer'?"

"Are you going to tell me the story about Uncle Naveen again?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't I? When I was sick, as a girl, your uncle walked seven times around the temple and asked God to let him fail his exams just as long as I got better."

"If I failed the math test and told you that story, you'd slap me and ask what one has to do with the other."

His mother turned to the altar. "What sort of sons did you give me, God?" she asked. "One you drown, the other is this selfish fool."

"I will fast today so that God puts some sense in me," Ajay said, glancing away from the altar and up at his mother. He liked the drama of fasting.

"No, you are a growing boy." His mother knelt down beside him and said to the altar, "He is stupid, but he has a good heart."

Prayer, Ajay thought, should appeal with humility and an open heart to some greater force. But the praying that he and his mother did felt sly and confused. By treating God as someone to bargain with, it seemed to him, they prayed as if they were casting a spell.

This meant that it was possible to do away with the presence of God entirely. For example, Ajay's mother had recently asked a relative in India to drive a nail into a holy tree and tie a saffron thread to the nail on Aman's behalf. Ajay invented his own ritual. On his way to school each morning, he passed a thick tree rooted half on the sidewalk and half on the road. One day, Ajay got the idea that if he circled the tree seven times, touching the north side every other time, he would have a lucky day. From then on, he did it every morning, although he felt embarrassed and always looked around beforehand to make sure no one was watching.

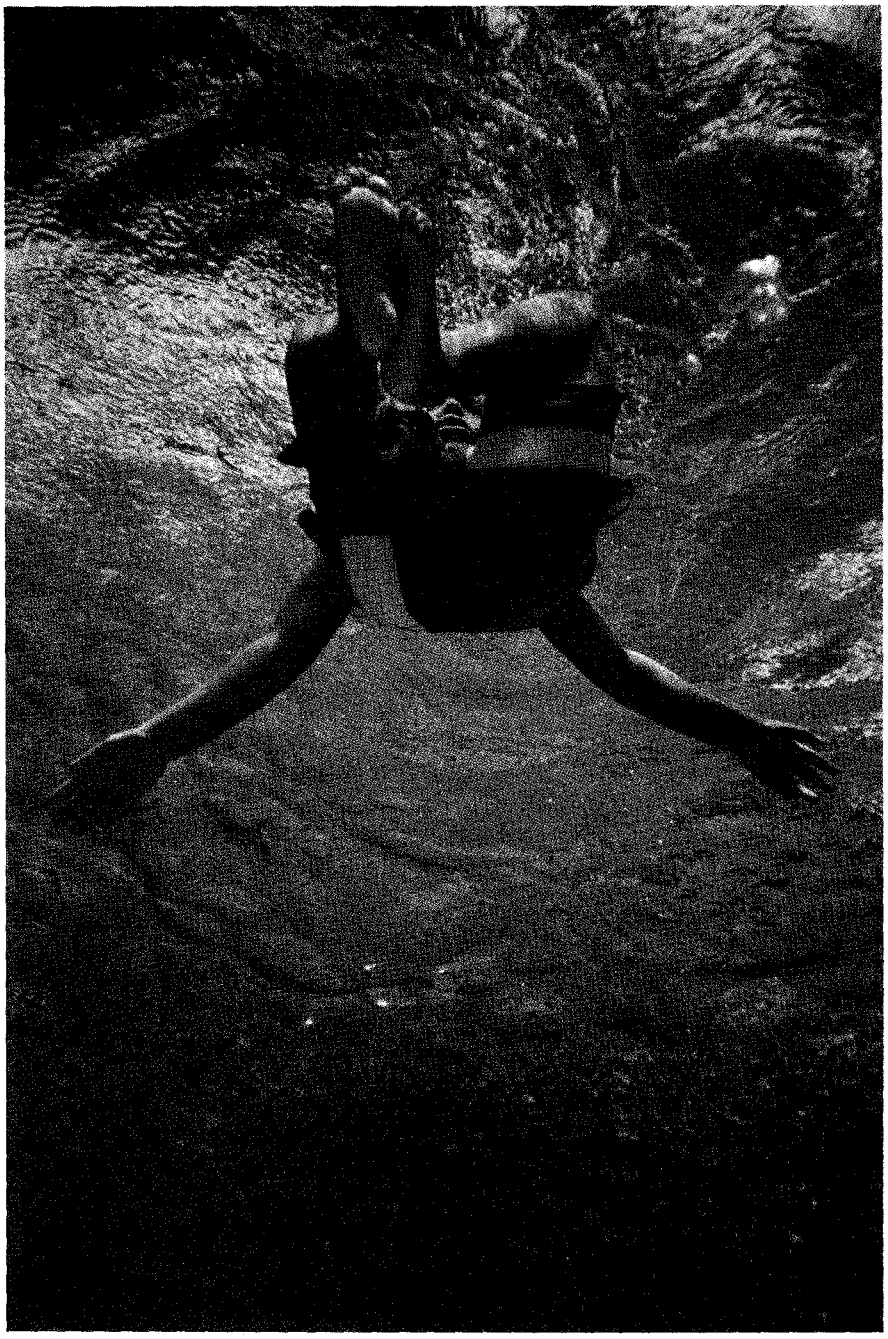
One night, Ajay asked God whether he minded being prayed to only in need.

"You think of your toe only when you stub it," God replied. God looked like Clark Kent. He wore a gray cardigan, slacks, and thick glasses, and had a forelock that curled just as Ajay's did.

God and Ajay had begun talking occasionally after Aman drowned. Now they talked most nights while Ajay lay in bed and waited for sleep. God sat at the foot of Ajay's mattress. His mother's mattress lay parallel to his, a few feet away. Originally, God had appeared to Ajay as Krishna, but Ajay had felt foolish discussing brain damage with a blue God who held a flute and wore a dhoti.

"You're not angry with me for touching the tree and all that?"

"No. I'm flexible."



PAMELA CRIMMINS/PIEROGI GALLERY

"I respect you. The tree is just a way of praying to you," Ajay assured God.

God laughed. "I am not too caught up in formalities."

Ajay was quiet. He was convinced that he had been marked as special by Aman's accident. The beginnings of all heroes are distinguished by misfortune. Superman and Batman were both orphans. Krishna was separated from his parents at birth. The god Ram had to spend fourteen years in a forest. Ajay waited to speak until it would not appear improper to begin talking about himself.

"How famous will I be?" he asked, finally.

"I can't tell you the future," God answered.

Ajay asked, "Why not?"

"Even if I told you something, later I might change my mind."

"But it might be harder to change your mind after you have said something will happen."

God laughed again. "You'll be so famous that fame will be a problem."

Ajay sighed. His mother snorted and rolled over.

"I want Aman's drowning to lead to something," he said to God.

"He won't be forgotten."

"I can't just be famous, though. I need

to be rich, too, to take care of Mummy and Daddy and pay Aman's hospital bills."

"You are always practical." God had a soulful and pitying voice and God's sympathy made Ajay imagine himself as a truly tragic figure, like Amitabh Bachchan in the movie "Trishul."

"I have responsibilities," Ajay said. He was so excited at the thought of his possible greatness that he knew he would have difficulty sleeping. Perhaps he would have to go read in the bathroom.

"You can hardly imagine the life ahead," God said.

Even though God's tone promised greatness, the idea of the future frightened Ajay. He opened his eyes. There was light coming from the street. The room was cold and had a smell of must and incense. His aunt and uncle's house was a narrow two-story home next to a four-lane road. The apartment building with the pool where Aman had drowned was a few blocks up the road, one in a cluster of tall brick buildings with stucco fronts. Ajay pulled the blanket tighter around him. In India, he could not have imagined the reality of his life in America: the thick smell of meat in the school cafeteria, the many television channels. And, of course, he could not have imagined Aman's accident, or the hospital where he spent so much time.

The hospital was boring. Vinod, Ajay's cousin, picked him up after school and dropped him off there almost every day. Vinod was twenty-two. In addition to attending county college and studying computer programming, he worked at a 7-Eleven near Ajay's school. He often brought Ajay hot chocolate and a comic from the store, which had to be returned, so Ajay was not allowed to open it until he had wiped his hands.

Vinod usually asked him a riddle on the way to the hospital. "Why are manhole covers round?" It took Ajay half the ride to admit that he did not know. He was having difficulty talking. He didn't know why. The only time he could talk easily was when he was with God. The explanation he gave himself for this was that, just as he couldn't chew when there was too much in his mouth, he couldn't talk when there were too many thoughts in his head.

When Ajay got to Aman's room, he greeted him as if he were all right. "Hello, lazy. How much longer are you going to sleep?" His mother was always there. She got up and hugged Ajay. She asked how school had been, and he didn't know what to say. In music class, the teacher sang a song about a sailor who had bared his breast before jumping into the sea. This had caused the other students to giggle. But Ajay could not say the word "breast" to his mother without blushing. He had also cried. He'd been thinking of how Aman's accident had made his own life mysterious and confused. What would happen next? Would Aman die or would he go on as he was? Where would they live? Usually when Ajay cried in school, he was told to go outside. But it had been raining, and the teacher had sent him into the hallway. He sat on the floor and wept. Any mention of this would upset his mother. And so he said nothing had happened that day.

Sometimes when Ajay arrived his mother was on the phone, telling his father that she missed him and was expecting to see him on Friday. His father took a Greyhound bus most Fridays from Queens to Arlington, returning on Sunday night in time to work the next day. He was a bookkeeper for a department store. Before the accident, Ajay had thought of his parents as the same person: MummyDaddy. Now, when he saw his father praying stiffly or when his father failed to say hello to Aman in his hospital bed, Ajay sensed that his mother and father were quite different people. After his mother got off the phone, she always went to the cafeteria to get coffee for herself and jello or cookies for him. He knew that if she took her coat with her it meant that she was especially sad. Instead of going directly to the cafeteria, she was going to go outside and walk around the hospital parking lot.

That day, while she was gone, Ajay stood beside the hospital bed and balanced a comic book on Aman's chest. He read to him very slowly. Before turning each page, he said, "O.K., Aman?"

Aman was fourteen. He was thin and had curly hair. Immediately after the accident, there had been so many machines around his bed that only one person could stand beside him at a time. Now there was just a single waxy yellow tube. One end of this went into his abdomen; the other, blocked by a green bullet-shaped plug, was what his Isocal milk was poured through. When not

"He's cooing on the ledge. May I take a message?"

being used, the tube was rolled up and bound by a rubber band and tucked beneath Aman's hospital gown. But even with the tube hidden it was obvious that there was something wrong with Aman. It was in his stillness and his open eyes. Once, in their house in Queens, Ajay had left a plastic bowl on a radiator overnight and the sides had drooped and sagged so that the bowl looked a little like an eye. Aman reminded Ajay of that bowl.

Ajay had not gone with his brother to the swimming pool on the day of the accident, because he had been reading a book and wanted to finish it. But he heard the ambulance siren from his aunt and uncle's house. The pool was only a few minutes away, and when he got there a crowd had gathered around the ambulance. Ajay saw his uncle first, in shorts and an undershirt, talking to a man inside the ambulance. His aunt was standing beside him. Then Ajay saw Aman on a stretcher, in blue shorts with a plastic mask over his nose and mouth. His aunt hurried over to take Ajay home. He cried as they walked, although he had been certain that Aman would be fine in a few days: in a Spider-Man comic he had just read, Aunt May had fallen into a coma and she had woken up perfectly fine. Ajay had cried simply because he felt crying was called for by the seriousness of the occasion. Perhaps this moment would mark the beginning of his future greatness. From that day on, Ajay found it hard to cry in front of his family. Whenever tears started coming, he felt like a liar. If he loved his brother, he knew, he would not have thought about himself as the ambulance had pulled away, nor would he talk with God at night about becoming famous.

When Ajay's mother returned to Aman's room with coffee and cookies, she sometimes talked to Ajay about Aman. She told him that when Aman was six he had seen a children's television show that had a character named Chunu, which was Aman's nickname, and he had thought the show was based on his own life. But most days Ajay went into the lounge to read. There was a TV in the corner and a lamp near a window that looked out over a parking lot. It was the perfect place to read. Ajay liked fantasy novels where the hero, who was preferably under the age of twenty-five, had an undiscovered talent that made him famous when it was revealed. He could read for hours without interruption, and sometimes when Vinod came to drive Ajay and his mother home from the hospital it was hard for him to remember the details of the real day that had passed.

One evening, when he was in the lounge, he saw a rock star being interviewed on "Entertainment Tonight." The musician, dressed in a sleeveless undershirt that revealed a swarm of tattoos on his arms and shoulders, had begun to shout at the audience, over his interviewer, "Don't watch me! Live your life! I'm not you!" Filled with a sudden desire to do something, Ajay hurried out of the television lounge and stood on the sidewalk in front of the hospital entrance. But he did not know what to do. It was cold and dark and there was an enormous moon. Cars leaving the parking lot stopped one by one at the edge of the road. Ajay watched as they waited for an opening in the traffic, their brake lights glowing.

"Are things getting worse?" Ajay asked God. The weekend before had been Thanksgiving. Christmas soon would come, and a new year would start, a year during which Aman would not have talked or walked. Suddenly, Ajay understood hopelessness. Hopelessness felt very much like fear. It involved a clutching in the stomach and a numbness in the arms and legs.

"What do you think?" God answered.

"They seem to be."

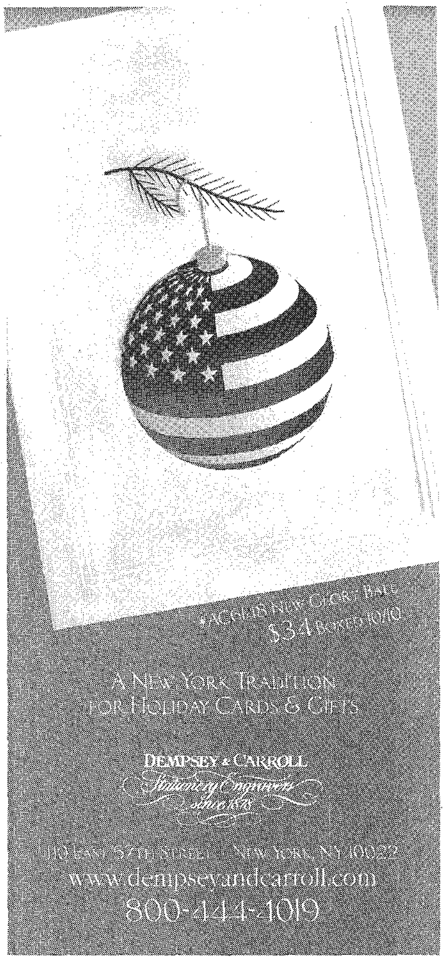
"At least Aman's hospital hasn't forced him out."

"At least Aman isn't dead. At least Daddy's Greyhound bus has never skidded off a bridge." Lately, Ajay had begun talking much more quickly to God than he used to. Before, when he had talked to God, Ajay would think of what God would say in response before he said anything. Now, Ajay spoke without knowing how God might respond.

"You shouldn't be angry at me." God sighed. God was wearing his usual cardigan. "You can't understand why I do what I do."

"You should explain better, then."

"Christ was my son. I loved Job. How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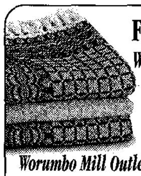

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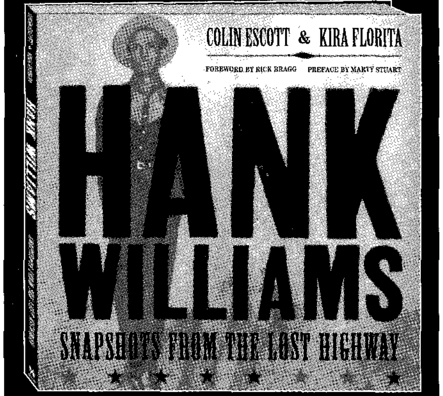

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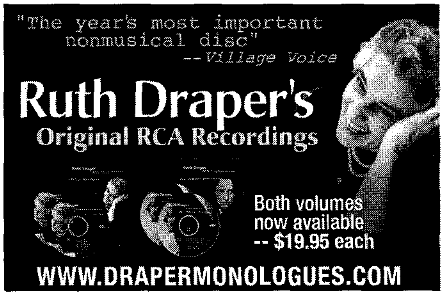

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long did Ram have to live in a forest?"

"What does that have to do with me?" This was usually the cue for discussing Ajay's prospects. But hopelessness made the future feel even more frightening than the present.

"I can't tell you what the connection is, but you'll be proud of yourself."

They were silent for a while.

"Do you love me truly?" Ajay asked.

"Yes."

"Will you make Aman normal?" As soon as Ajay asked the question, God ceased to be real. Ajay knew then that he was alone, lying under his blankets, his face exposed to the cold dark.

"I can't tell you the future," God said softly. These were words that Ajay already knew.

"Just get rid of the minutes when Aman lay on the bottom of the pool. What are three minutes to you?"

"Presidents die in less time than that. Planes crash in less time than that."

Ajay opened his eyes. His mother was on her side and she had a blanket pulled up to her neck. She looked like an ordinary woman. It surprised him that you couldn't tell, looking at her, that she had a son who was brain-dead.

In fact, things were getting worse. Putting away his mother's mattress and his own in a closet in the morning, getting up very early so he could use the bathroom before his aunt or uncle did, spending so many hours in the hospital—all this had given Ajay the reassuring sense that real life was in abeyance, and that what was happening was unreal. He and his mother and brother were just waiting to make a long-delayed bus trip. The bus would come eventually to carry them to Queens, where he would return to school at P.S. 20 and to Sunday afternoons spent at the Hindi movie theatre under the trestle for the 7 train. But now Ajay was starting to understand that the world was always real, whether you were reading a book or sleeping, and that it eroded you every day.

He saw the evidence of this erosion in his mother, who had grown severe and unforgiving. Usually when Vinod brought her and Ajay home from the hospital, she had dinner with the rest of the family. After his mother helped his aunt wash the dishes, the two women watched theological action movies. One night, in spite of a headache that had made her sit with her eyes closed all afternoon, she ate dinner, washed dishes, sat down in front of the TV. As soon as the movie was over, she went upstairs, vomited, and lay on her mattress with a wet towel over her forehead. She asked Ajay to massage her neck and shoulders. As he did so, Ajay noticed that she was crying. The tears frightened Ajay and made him angry. "You shouldn't have watched TV," he said accusingly.

"I have to," she said. "People will cry with you once, and they will cry with you a second time. But if you cry a third time, people will say you are boring and always crying."

Ajay did not want to believe what she had said, but her cynicism made him think that she must have had conversations with his aunt and uncle that he did not know about. "That's not true," he told her, massaging her scalp. "Uncle is kind. Auntie Aruna is always kind."

"What do you know?" She shook her head, freeing herself from Ajay's fingers. She stared at him. Upside down, her face looked unfamiliar and terrifying. "If God lets Aman live long enough, you will become a stranger, too. You will say, 'I have been unhappy for so long because of Aman, now I don't want to talk about him or look at him.' Don't think I don't know you," she said.

Suddenly, Ajay hated himself. To hate himself was to see himself as the opposite of everything he wanted to be: short instead of tall, fat instead of thin. When he brushed his teeth that night, he looked at his face: his chin was round and fat as a heel. His nose was so broad that he had once been able to fit a small rock in one nostril.

His father was also being eroded. Before the accident, Ajay's father loved jokes—he could do perfect imitations—and Ajay had felt lucky to have him as a father. (Once, Ajay's father had convinced his own mother that he was possessed by the ghost of a British man.) And, even after the accident, his father had impressed Ajay with the patient loyalty of his weekly bus journeys. But now his father was different.

One Saturday afternoon, as Ajay and his father were returning from the hospital, his father slowed the car without warning and turned into the dirt parking lot of a bar that looked as though it had

GOSPEL

The new grass rising in the hills,
the cows loitering in the morning chill,
a dozen or more old browns hidden
in the shadows of the cottonwoods
beside the streambed. I go higher
to where the road gives up and there's
only a faint path strewn with lupine
between the mountain oaks. I don't
ask myself what I'm looking for.
I didn't come for answers
to a place like this, I came to walk
on the earth, still cold, still silent.
Still ungiving, I've said to myself,
although it greets me with last year's
dead thistles and this year's
hard spines, early-blooming
wild onions, the curling remains
of spider's cloth. What did I bring
to the dance? In my back pocket
a crushed letter from a woman
I've never met bearing bad news
I can do nothing about. So I wander
these woods half sightless while
a west wind picks up in the trees
clustered above. The pines make
a music like no other, rising and
falling like a distant surf at night
that calms the darkness before
first light. "Soughing" we call it, from
Old English, no less. How weightless
words are when nothing will do.

—*Philip Levine*

originally been a small house. It had a pitched roof with a black tarp. At the edge of the lot stood a tall neon sign of an orange hand lifting a mug of sudsy golden beer. Ajay had never seen anybody drink except in the movies. He wondered whether his father was going to ask for directions to somewhere, and, if so, to where.

His father said, "One minute," and they climbed out of the car.

They went up wooden steps into the bar. Inside, it was dark and smelled of cigarette smoke and something stale and sweet. The floor was linoleum like the kitchen at his aunt and uncle's. There was a bar with stools around it, and a basketball game played on a television bolted against the ceiling, like the one in Aman's hospital room.

His father stood by the bar waiting for the bartender to notice him. His father had a round face and was wearing a white shirt and dark dress pants, as he often did on the weekend, since it was more economical to have the same clothes for the office and home.

The bartender came over. "How much for a Budweiser?" his father asked.

It was a dollar fifty. "Can I buy a single cigarette?" He did not have to buy; the bartender would just give him one. His father helped Ajay up onto a stool and sat down himself. Ajay looked around and wondered what would happen if somebody started a knife fight. When his father had drunk half his beer, he carefully lit the cigarette. The bartender was standing at the end of the bar. There were only two other men in

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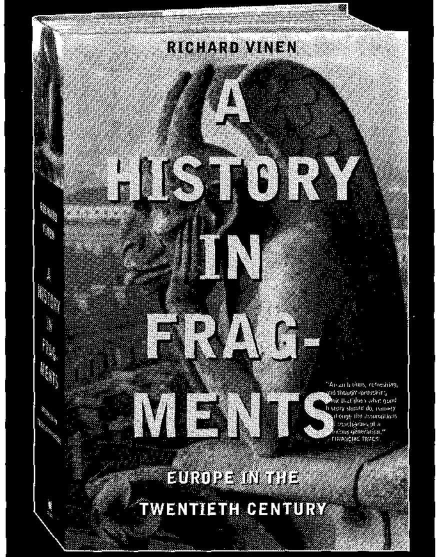

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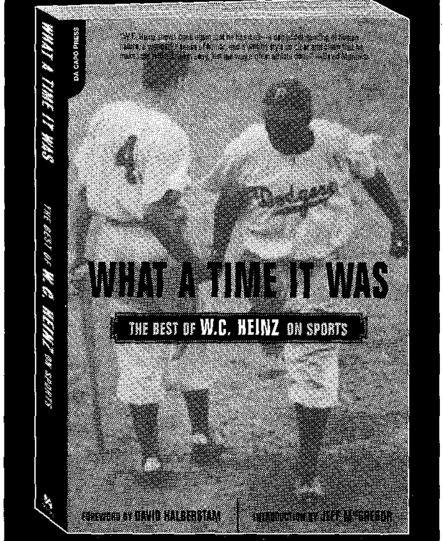
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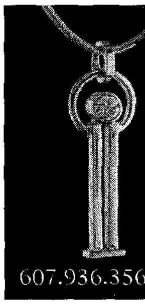

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the place. Ajay was disappointed that there were no women wearing dresses slit all the way up their thighs. Perhaps they came in the evenings.

His father asked him if he had ever watched a basketball game all the way through.

"I've seen the Harlem Globetrotters."

His father smiled and took a sip. "I've heard they don't play other teams, because they can defeat everyone else so easily."

"They only play against each other, unless there is an emergency—like in the cartoon, when they play against the aliens to save the Earth," Ajay said.

"Aliens?"

Ajay blushed as he realized his father was teasing him.

When they left, the light outside felt too bright. As his father opened the car door for Ajay, he said, "I'm sorry." That's when Ajay first felt that his father might have done something wrong. The thought made him worry. Once they were on the road, his father said gently, "Don't tell your mother."

Fear made Ajay feel cruel. He asked his father, "What do you think about when you think of Aman?"

Instead of becoming sad, Ajay's father smiled. "I am surprised by how strong he is. It's not easy for him to keep living. But, even before, he was strong. When he was interviewing for high-school scholarships, one interviewer asked him, 'Are you a thinker or a doer?' He laughed and said, 'That's like asking, "Are you an idiot or a moron?"' "

From then on, they often stopped at the bar on the way back from the hospital. Ajay's father always asked the bartender for a cigarette before he sat down, and during the ride home he always reminded Ajay not to tell his mother.

Ajay found that he himself was changing. His superstitions were becoming extreme. Now when he walked around the good-luck tree he punched it, every other time, hard, so that his knuckles hurt. Afterward, he would hold his breath for a moment longer than he thought he could bear, and ask God to give the unused breaths to Aman.

In December, a place opened in one of the good long-term care facilities. It was in New Jersey. This meant that Ajay and his mother could move back to New York and live with his father again. This was the news Ajay's father brought when he arrived for a two-week holiday at Christmas.

Ajay felt the clarity of panic. Life would be the same as before the accident but also unimaginably different. He would return to P.S. 20, while Aman continued to be fed through a tube in his abdomen. Life would be Aman's getting older and growing taller than their parents but having less consciousness than even a dog, which can become excited or afraid.

Ajay decided to use his devotion to shame God into fixing Aman. The fact that two religions regarded the coming December days as holy ones suggested to Ajay that prayers during this time would be especially potent. So he prayed whenever he thought of it—at his locker, even in the middle of a quiz. His mother wouldn't let him fast, but he started throwing away the lunch he took to school. And when his mother prayed in the morning Ajay watched to make sure that she bowed at least once toward each of the postcards of deities. If she did not, he bowed three times to the possibly offended god on the postcard. He had noticed that his father finished his prayers in less time than it took to brush his teeth. And so now, when his father began praying in the morning, Ajay immediately crouched down beside him, because he knew his father would be embarrassed to get up first. But Ajay found it harder and harder to drift into the rhythm of sung prayers or into his nightly conversations with God. How could chanting and burning incense undo three minutes of a sunny August afternoon? It was like trying to move a sheet of blank paper from one end of a table to the other by blinking so fast that you started a breeze.

On Christmas Eve, his mother asked the hospital chaplain to come to Aman's room and pray with them. The family knelt together beside Aman's bed. Afterward, the chaplain asked her whether she would be attending Christmas services. "Of course, Father," she said.

"I'm also coming," Ajay said.

The chaplain turned toward Ajay's father, who was sitting in a wheelchair because there was nowhere else to sit.

"I'll wait for God at home," he said.

That night, Ajay watched "It's a Wonderful Life" on television. To him, the movie meant that happiness arrived late, if ever. Later, when he got in bed and closed his eyes, God appeared. There was little to say.

"Will Aman be better in the morning?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"When you prayed for the math exam, you could have asked for Aman to get better and, instead of your getting an A, Aman would have woken."

This was so ridiculous that Ajay opened his eyes. His father was sleeping nearby on folded-up blankets. Ajay felt disappointed at not feeling guilt. Guilt might have contained some hope that God existed.

When Ajay arrived at the hospital with his father and mother the next morning, Aman was asleep, breathing through his mouth while a nurse poured a can of Isocal into his stomach through the yellow tube. Ajay had not expected that Aman would have recovered; nevertheless, seeing him that way put a weight in Ajay's chest.

The Christmas prayers were held in a large, mostly empty room: people in chairs sat next to people in wheelchairs. His father walked out in the middle of the service.

Later, Ajay sat in a corner of Aman's room and watched his parents. His mother was reading a Hindi women's magazine to Aman while she shelled peanuts into her lap. His father was reading a thick red book in preparation for a civil-service exam. The day wore on. The sky outside grew dark. At some point, Ajay began to cry. He tried to be quiet. He did not want his parents to notice his tears and think that he was crying for Aman, because in reality he was crying for how difficult his own life was.

His father noticed first. "What's the matter, hero?"

His mother shouted, "What happened?" and she sounded so alarmed it was as if Ajay were bleeding.

"I didn't get any Christmas presents. I need a Christmas present," Ajay shouted. "You didn't buy me a Christmas present." And then, because he had revealed his own selfishness, Ajay let himself sob. "You have to give me something. I should get something for all this." Ajay clenched his hands and wiped his face with his fists. "Each time I come here I should get something."

His mother pulled him up and pressed him into her stomach. His father came and stood beside them. "What do you want?" his father asked.

Ajay had no prepared answer for this.

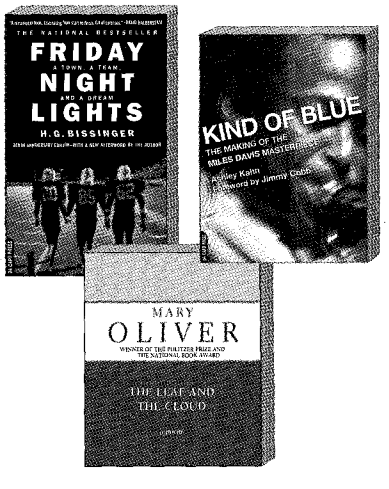
"What do you want?" his mother repeated.

The only thing he could think was "I want to eat pizza and I want candy."

His mother stroked his hair and called him her little baby. She kept wiping his face with a fold of her sari. When at last he stopped crying, they decided that Ajay's father should take him back to his aunt and uncle's. On the way, they stopped at a mini-mall. It was a little after five, and the streetlights were on. Ajay and his father did not take off their winter coats as they ate, in a pizzeria staffed by Chinese people. While he chewed, Ajay closed his eyes and tried to imagine God looking like Clark Kent, wearing a cardigan and eyeglasses, but he could not. Afterward, Ajay and his father went next door to a magazine shop and Ajay got a bag of Three Musketeers bars and a bag of Reese's peanut butter cups, and then he was tired and ready for home.

He held the candy in his lap while his father drove in silence. Even through the plastic, he could smell the sugar and chocolate. Some of the houses outside were dark, and others were outlined in Christmas lights.

After a while, Ajay rolled down the window slightly. The car filled with wind. They passed the building where Aman's accident had occurred. Ajay had not walked past it since the accident. When they drove by, he usually looked away. Now he tried to spot the fenced swimming pool at the building's side. He wondered whether the pool that had pressed itself into Aman's mouth and lungs and stomach had been drained, so that nobody would be touched by its unlucky waters. Probably it had not been emptied until fall. All summer long, people must have swum in the pool and sat on its sides, splashing their feet in the water, and not known that his brother had lain for three minutes on its concrete bottom one August afternoon. ◆



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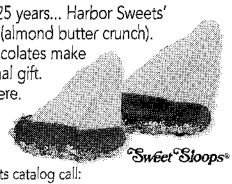

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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE HOBBIT HABIT

Reading "The Lord of the Rings."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Quenuvalye i lamber Eldareva? A boring question, I know, and I'm sure that people ask you the same thing all the time. What it means, of course, is "Thou canst speak the language of the Elves?," and, if for some unpardonable reason your Elvish is on the rusty side, you have until December 19th to make it shine anew, even as the tumbling waters of Nimrodel refresh the weary traveller who ventures unto Lothlórien, below the eaves of the Golden Wood. For, on that day, men in the bright havens of the West, and along the storm-tongued seaboard of the East, and at your nearest multiplex pretty well everywhere in between, will release the first installment of "The Lord of the Rings," rated PG-13. Ele! Eglerio! Laite! And a box of Raisinets!

The film has been a long time coming. An animated, severely truncated version arrived on our screens in 1978, but this fortress of a story has a habit of repelling invaders. "The Lord of the Rings" is about hobbits—small, peaceable souls, the tops of whose heads lie level with the average human crotch. The plot tells of a journey taken by Frodo Baggins and his hobbit companions from the Shire, where they have long conducted blameless lives, to the land of Mordor, far away to the east, where Frodo must hurl a ring of inexpressible power into the crater of Mount Doom. Everything about the book seems so earthy and rooted, so densely planted with discernible characters and landscapes, that you would expect movie directors to leap upon it with glee, and yet something—some mysterious element of wit or magic—has been missing. Now we know what the element is: three hundred million dollars. That, give or take a few million, was what the director Peter Jackson was given to play with: a gratifying deal, considering that, unlike Bilbo Baggins—uncle of Frodo and hero of "The Hobbit," the predecessor to "The Lord of the Rings"—he didn't have to sneak past a dragon in order to lay his hands on the loot. The bulk of it seems to have been spent on re-creating Middle-earth, the place where the story unfurls. People who complain that for three hundred million you could purchase a small nation are absolutely right, but that only proves what a bargain this movie may turn out to be. Jackson isn't buying himself a country; he's building us a world.

The film, like J. R. R. Tolkien's original novel, will appear in three parts. After "The Fellowship of the Ring," we will be forced to wait twelve months for "The Two Towers"—a period of reflection that, given the title, is probably a good thing. Finally, at the end of 2003, we will don our chain mail and stand to greet "The Return of the King." No one can say whether audiences will stick with the story, or whether, in two years' time, they will have dwindled to a small band of hobbit wanna-bes, lining up glumly in the rain. All that Jackson can do is look back at the example of Tolkien himself. When "The Fellowship of the Ring" came out, in 1954, Tolkien's publisher, Allen & Unwin, gambled on selling as many as thirty-five hundred copies, falling to thirty-two hundred and fifty for "The Two Towers," and so down to three thousand for "The Return of the King," the following year. In the event, this estimate proved a little cautious. By the end of 1968, total readership of the trilogy was thought to stand at around fifty million.

And so, once again, we will enter the outlandish plenitude of Middle-earth. For the next two years, we will be assailed by unorthodox creatures, the like of which many of us will have read about but few will have witnessed in the flesh. Towering or stumpy, brazen or subtle, smooth or hirsute, gabbling or speechless, yellow-bellied or stout of heart, reassuringly human or halfway to the swamp: there's no two ways about it, Tolkien fans are a funny bunch.

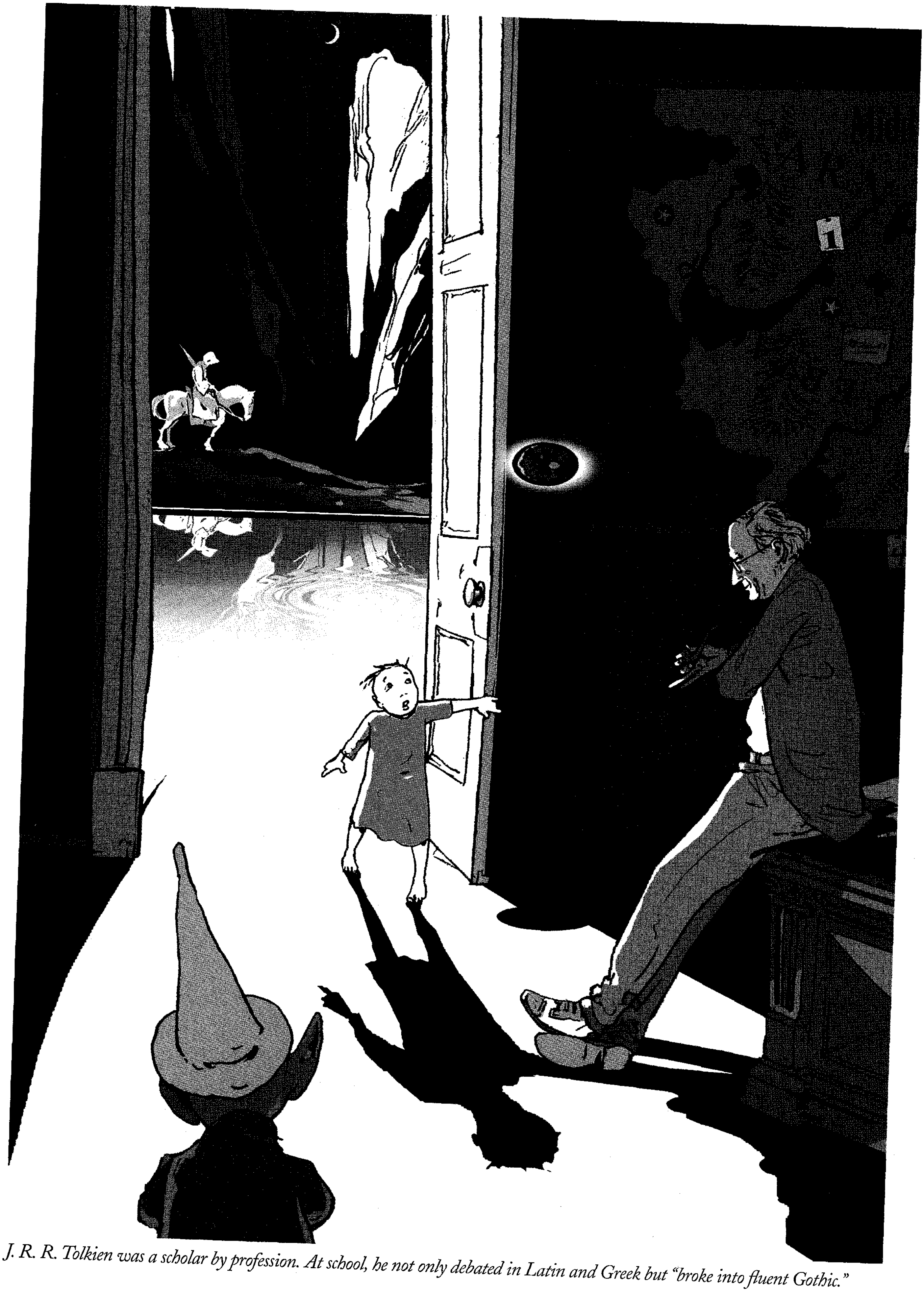
I should know, for I was one of them. Been there, done that, read the book, gone mad. I first took on "The Lord of the Rings" at the age of eleven or twelve; to be precise, I began it at the age of eleven and finished at the age of twelve. It was, and remains, not a book that you happen to read, like any other, but a book that happens to you: a chunk bitten out of your life.

The size of the beast is important in this respect. Tolkien sales remained earthbound until 1965, at which point the three parts of the novel were clamped together and published in America as an unauthorized one-volume paperback; five months later, an official equivalent hit the bookshops, whereupon sales went through the roof and never came back down. That one-volume slab was a challenge in itself. The thrill of it was pricking you before the story even began; you turned over the title page, and the next page was bare, except for an eight-line chant. One couplet went straight to your bones:

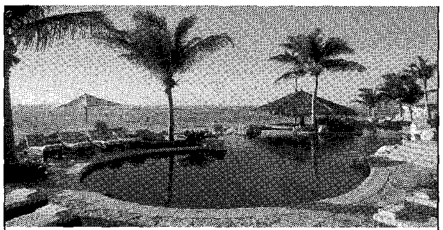
> One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them

Even at the time, something cinematic stirred in those words; they reminded me of the drumbeats that her-

ISTVAN BANYAI



J. R. R. Tolkien was a scholar by profession. At school, he not only debated in Latin and Greek but "broke into fluent Gothic."



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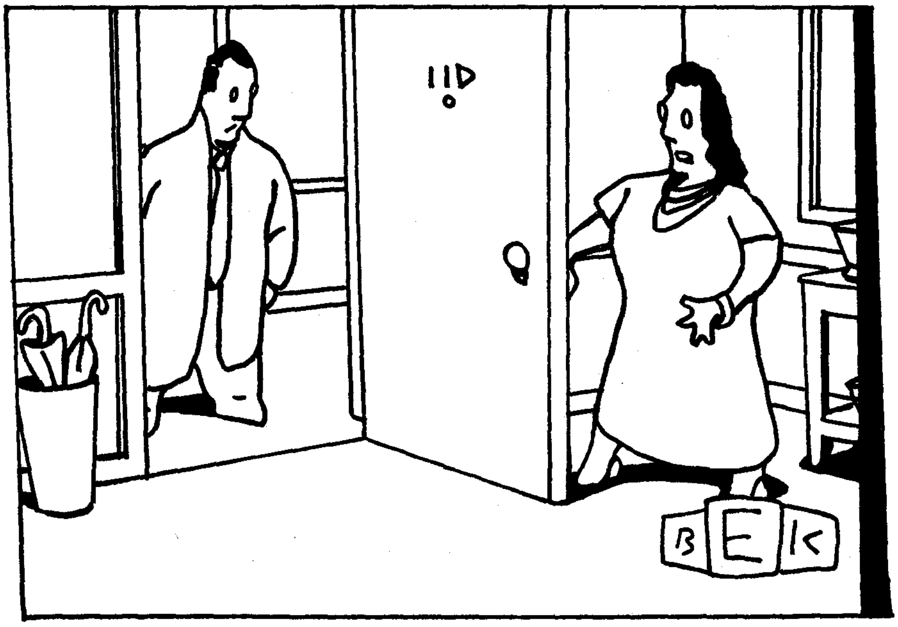
ald the flame-lit appearance of King Kong, and it came as no surprise to hear the lines intoned again, when the trailers for "The Lord of the Rings" started playing in theatres this year. Six lines into the book, and the author had us exactly where he wanted us; even the foreword, two pages later, continued the doomy thrill. "This tale grew in the telling," Tolkien wrote, introducing the second edition, and that blend of modesty and grandeur hinted at a process of growth beyond his reckoning, as if the story we were about to read possessed a life of its own.

Before embarking, I had one more detail to attend to. I flipped to the back, not to sneak a glance at how happily the narrative would end—a matter on which I am more undecided than ever—but to frighten myself with a simple count. A thousand and seventy-seven pages: the number itself was like a spell. (Tolkien had typed the whole thing out with two fingers.) My idea of a big book, until then, had been "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," and even there I had become bogged down in the Oompa-Loompas. So how on earth would I grind my way through this great brick? One answer was "The Hobbit," which my friends and I read by way of a training program; if we could follow Bilbo to the dragon's lair and evade the inquiries of the slimy Gollum ("What has it got in its pocketses?"), we would be primed for the longer haul, like mountaineers who haunt their local hills before setting off for Nepal. What the explorer of "The Lord of the Rings" soon comes to understand as he launches himself into the text, and what puffs him with pride as, weeks or months later, he reviews his completed task, is the fact that this book about a quest is itself a quest. You battle through it, against the odds; you fend off the blizzards of bewildering mythology; you stand firm as the reams of dodgy dialogue try to suck you into the mire; and you come through. If you encounter it as a child, it will be the longest book that you have ever mastered, and, for many adults, it will retain that talismanic status. The tale grew in the telling, but, more significantly, the reader grows in the reading; such is the source of Tolkien's power, and it is weirder and more far-reaching than even he could have foretold. I wonder what he had in his pocketses.

Certainly, by the time I reached page 1,077, I was more hobbit than schoolboy. Without further ado, I cast myself in the part of Frodo and wasted no time in appointing various acquaintances to the secondary roles: Gandalf (good wizard), Saruman (good wizard gone bad), Sam (sidekick), Gimli (dwarf), Legolas (elf), and Aragorn (quiet fellow who sits at the back of a pub and turns out to be



"I'm not quite ready yet. Why don't you come in and make us a drink while I figure out how not to project all my hopes and fears onto you?"

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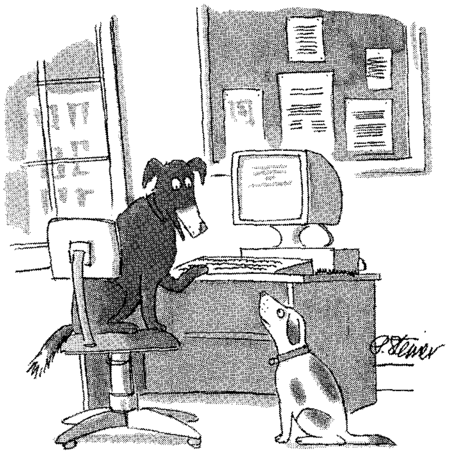

“On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.”

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descended from fifty-one generations of known royalty). Then there was Frodo's mission: to destroy forever the One Ring, and so to prevent it from falling into the hands, or slipping onto the finger, of the dark lord named Sauron. This is at once virtuous, foolhardy, guaranteed to save civilization, and extremely difficult to enact within the confines of a school playground. Nevertheless, we persevered, and many were the ring-pulls plucked bravely from cans of Coke and cast into the uttermost depths of the trash.

In later life, I discovered that, in comparison with other Tolkien-watchers, I was a pitiful novice. True, when the fine Swedish movie "Together" was released, earlier this year, I was one of the few sad headcases in the audience who realized that the squeaky electronic tunes on the soundtrack came from "The Lord of the Rings"—an instrumental album by the Swedish mood musician Bo Hansson. That, however, is small fry. One friend recently confessed that he had learned to speak Elvish, and true believers have any number of Tolkien societies and fanzines to choose from; I own a slim publication entitled "The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth," by Ruth S. Noel, who seems perfectly unbothered at having compiled a phrase book for a country that does not exist. Maybe that is why "The Lord of the Rings" became a bible of the counterculture, whose proponents were eager to find an alternative—any alternative—to the countries that *did* exist. In the late sixties, American students liked to sport badges that read "Gandalf for President," and one can picture them musing long and hard on Bilbo Baggins, discovered by Frodo in the chill-out sanctuary of Rivendell: "Time doesn't seem to pass here," Bilbo says. "It just is."

A couple of years ago, there was a TV documentary on Tolkien, and what stood out was the clip of a song, "The Ballad of Bilbo Baggins." Not a folksy, lute-backed number but a mid-sixties funkfest, complete with dancers in abbreviated skirts. Center stage was a familiar figure making a forlorn attempt at early rap; that figure, I regret to say, was Leonard Nimoy. I can see the connection—Mr. Spock's ears were definitely a subspecies of the Elvish ear—but the idea that "The Lord of the Rings" belongs in any sense to the province of science fiction strikes me as a gross misreading of the map. The trek that interested Tolkien was not from one star to the next. His kind of trek was hard on the feet, short on humor, and knee-deep in mud; it may have been imaginary, but, within the boundaries of his busy imagination, it was all true.

Tolkien himself hardly went anywhere. He was an expert in Old Norse, but not once did he visit Scandinavia. He hated France, and not only because he hated French food; in the words of his biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, the Norman invasion of England, in 1066, "pained him almost as much as if it had happened in his own lifetime." Perhaps the most significant journey was one that he failed to make. He was born in South Africa in 1892, the son of an Englishman who had taken up a position with the Bank of Africa in Bloemfontein. When John Ronald Reuel was three, his mother took him and his brother back to England for a while; during their absence, their father grew ill, and they made hasty plans to return. The young Ronald—as he was known—dictated a letter to his nurse. "My dear Daddy, I am so glad I am coming back to see you it is such a long time since we came away from you I hope the ship will bring us all back to you Mamie and Baby and me." Word came that his father had died, the letter was never sent, and one turns with new eyes to "The Return of the King"—to its closing pages, in which Frodo, his duty done, sets sail toward "a far green country under a swift sunrise."

Tolkien stayed with his mother in England; the family moved near a mill in a small village outside Birmingham. Most writers seem to own, or to have mislaid, a touchstone—something that gathers into itself all their memories of love or dread—and, in Tolkien's case, Sarehole Mill came to stand as his sacred place, and as a pastoral bulwark against the encroachments of industrial sprawl. The Tolkiens left it in 1900, for the sake of the boys' education, and from here on his life, though crowned with fame, bears the marks not of success but of intolerable loss. His mother died in 1904, bequeathing him her Roman Catholic faith; Tolkien remained a devout Catho-

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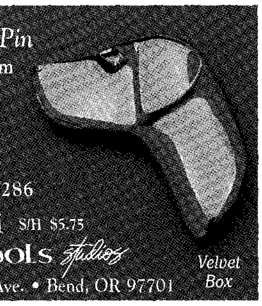

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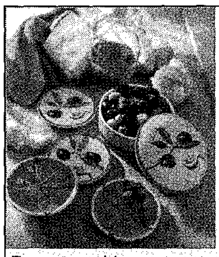

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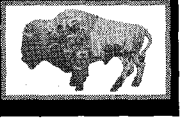

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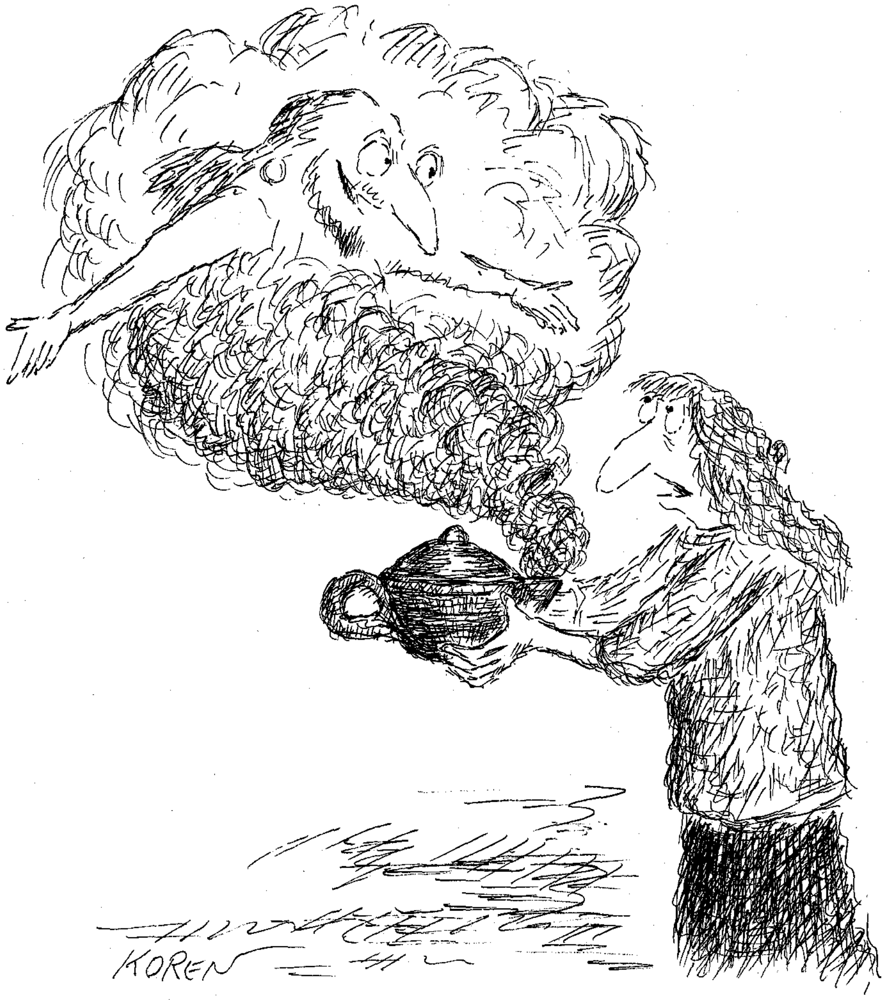

"All I really want is control over my own body!"

• •

lic until his death, in 1973. A sudden sense of the mortal world as treacherous, shadowy, and undeserving of one's trust is not uncommon among bereaved children, and, in Tolkien's case, the leap forward to the next catastrophe, on the Western front in 1916, feels wretchedly short. In between, it is true, he flourished at school, won a place at Oxford, and married a fellow-orphan named Edith Bratt. But two of his dearest friends from school were lost in the Battle of the Somme, the first day of which claimed twenty thousand lives. Tolkien himself, who fought on the Somme with the Lancashire Fusiliers, would undoubtedly have died in action, were it not for a case of trench fever that saw him invalided back to England. He was a tweedy, clubbable soul, relying as heavily on male friendship as on married bliss or the love of his four children, and he came to idolize the company that he had kept in his youth. Why else would Pippin, Merry, and Sam, Frodo's fellow-hobbits from the Shire, refuse to let him seek Mount Doom alone?

Tolkien was a scholar by profession. At school in Birmingham, he not only debated in Latin and Greek but, according to Humphrey Carpenter, "broke into fluent Gothic." At Oxford, he read first classics and then English. (His view of English literature, incidentally, ended more or less where the current view begins; he rarely ventured later than Chaucer, and thought Shakespeare to be pernicious nonsense.) After the war, he was just the man to take a job with the Oxford English Dictionary, working mostly on the letter "W"; Carpenter consulted Tolkien's entry for the word "wasp" and found cross-references to Old Saxon, Middle Dutch, Modern Dutch, Old High German, Middle Low German, Middle High German, Modern German, Old Teutonic, primitive pre-Teutonic, Lithuanian, Old Slavonic, Russian, and Latin. In short, Tolkien was a bit of a linguist. Back at Oxford, he was appointed Professor of Anglo-Saxon in 1925 and Professor of English in 1945, a post that he retained until 1959. Philologists have had a field day with his borrowings, beginning with the roster of dwarfs that accompany Bilbo Baggins, which Tolkien lifted directly from a tenth-century poem in the Poetic Edda, a collection of Icelandic verse. And could there be a better name for a land of ill repute than Mordor? In Elvish, it means Dark Land or Black Country; in Old English, it meant "mortal crime" or "murder," and you sense the full, historical heaviness of threat in Tolkien's coinage. All in all, it is strange to think of him as an unwitting sponsor of the counterculture; here was a man with culture coming out of his ears and, if you were lucky enough to attend his lectures, out of his mouth. The young W. H. Auden sat and listened to Tolkien reciting "Beowulf," the greatest and bloodiest of Old English poems. According to Auden, "The voice was the voice of Gandalf."

So what happened? How were hobbits made? We know, at least, how the first one came about. Tolkien himself described the day in the early nineteen-thirties when, in the midst of marking examination papers, he came to a blank page and scribbled on it, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." The breeding of further hobbits is harder to pin down. The work of Tolkien is infamously, almost scandalously, bereft of sex; nevertheless, at some point hobbit must have humped hobbit, presumably in a discreet hayrick, and, given the degree of superfluous hair that a hobbit displays on the parts of the body that you can see, such as his feet, one shudders to think of the forestation that occurs elsewhere.

"The Lord of the Rings" is lit with a reverence for nature in the raw, which makes it all the more surprising that Tolkien should have flinched away from natural functions. When Frodo and his band are given refuge by Tom Bombadil, a roving spirit of the woods, we are introduced to Goldberry, the woman with whom he lives: "Her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots." A little of this goes an awfully long way, although not far enough to explain the nature of the relationship between Goldberry and Tom. Indeed, given that he wears a blue jacket and yellow boots, and that he chooses to sing "Ring a ding dillo dell!" without provocation, I suspect that he is, in the profoundest sense, one of nature's bachelors. The film has dropped him altogether: a wise move, for Tom is more of a fairy tale than any other character in the book, and he was, in fact, devised by Tolkien in a bedtime story for his children.

It is at times like this, when the diction droops into the antique, that one struggles to defend the novel against its ranks of accusers. These are legion, beginning with an intemperate Edmund Wilson in 1956, and "The Lord of the Rings" has remained comically divisive; it is either adored, with varying degrees of guilt, or robustly despised, often by those who have yet to open it, or who never made it past the first sentence, with its daunting mention of Bilbo's "eleventy-first birthday." To read it again now, after a gap of decades, is both a rousing and a withering experience; nobody can deny the tweeness trap into which it repeatedly tumbles, or the way in which it tends, at moments of great import, to back off and scurry into the creaking comforts of outdated syntax. The hobbits, on their journey home from Mordor, arrive in the region of Eregion and stay for a week: or, rather, as Tolkien puts it, "Here now for seven days they tarried, for the time was at hand for another parting which they were loth to make." This is the high style, but it is height without self-consciousness; Joyce climbed up there, too, but his was a parodic quest, and he stripped bare the language of nobility as if removing a suit of armor. Hardly anyone had used it unironically since Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," and to revert to it with a straight face in the nineteen-fifties was to mount a head-on challenge to modernity; those forget-me-nots on Goldberry's belt were a real problem for anyone with a smuggled copy of "Lady Chatterley's Lover," in which Connie and Mellors employ the

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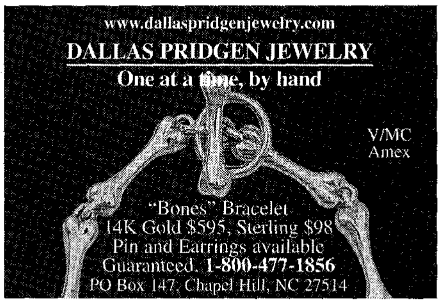
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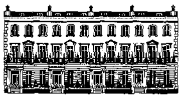
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I have never quite forgiven Tolkien for leading me on with Goldberry and the even more unearthly Galadriel, and thus leaving me with the distinct impression that all women were milk-pale maidens with waterfalls of yellow hair—a delusion that landed me in no end of trouble, and one that, even now, pains me like a war wound. But I was ripe for the gulling, because I read the book at the right age. To call "The Lord of the Rings" superior children's literature is not meant as denigration, because it seems ideally suited to superior children—not clever ones, that is, but those who stand on the crumbling brink of puberty and gaze both forward and back. Tolkien's characters, like teenagers, feel at once lonely and sociable; Frodo is aided by a merry band of friends, each of whom is prey to private fears, and the book itself, though dazzled by innocence, is also hungry to know the worst—to confront all varieties of darkness and dereliction. And, to be fair, there are still plenty of passages that infest your mind like lice. How tempting it is to follow Blake's reading of Milton, or, more recently, John Carey's black-edged take on Dickens, and to contend that Tolkien was, contrary to his own wishes, a pallid advocate of goodness but an inspired and intricate summoner of evil:

> A huge arm and shoulder, with a dark skin of greenish scales, was thrust through the widening gap. Then a great, flat, toeless foot was forced through below. . . . His broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red.

That is an orc-chieftain in the mines of Moria; notice how Tolkien shrugs off the fancy phrasing and whacks us hard with Germanic monosyllables. All the years of studying "Beowulf" have paid off. And there is worse on the way:

> The ranks of the orcs had opened, and they crowded away, as if they themselves were afraid. Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in and to go before it.

This, needless to say, is a Balrog, a subterranean nightmare who comes equipped with batwings and a multi-thonged whip as standard. The cast list of the new "Lord of the Rings" movie does not include Samuel L. Jackson; it seems a curious omission, since he is the man we need to stand on the bridge beside Gandalf, take one look at the Balrog, and declare, "That is one mean motherfucker."

There is a nasty moment, shortly afterward, when the Balrog cracks his whip and yanks Gandalf down with him into the abyss. The company must continue wizardless. What ensues is a prolonged dramatization of courage, interrupted by lyrical digression. We must think of the years—a dozen in all, from 1937 to 1949—in which the novel was composed. Think, for instance, of a young man from a village in middle England, or, for that matter, from a small town in the Midwest. He is summoned from a place that he knows like his own hand; he is packed off to a country of whose existence he was unaware and with which he had no quarrel; he is asked to fight, and possibly to die, in the defeat of an enemy whom he is barely expected to comprehend; and then, if he survives, he is sent back home, to resume his familiar ways. The cause in which he fought was plainly just, and thus worthy of sacrifice, but that was as much as he knew; its magnitude was beyond him. In other words, the Second World War was largely fought by hobbits. A senior elf called Elrond explains that Frodo's companions are drawn "from the Free Peoples of the World," and those capital letters could have been written only by someone who had listened to the speeches of Churchill and de Gaulle. Tolkien did not plan his book with the conflict in mind, and he fiercely denied all charges of allegory ("I dislike allegory whenever I *smell* it"); but he told his son Christopher, who was on active duty, that "we are attempting to conquer Sauron with the Ring," and it is safe to say that, if he had seen a G.I. resting up in a foxhole, sharing a quick smoke, he would have recognized a kindred spirit. The peaceniks who swarmed around "The Lord of the Rings," twenty years after the war, got the wrong end of the sword; peace is not something into which you endlessly drift but a tenuous blessing that you snap out of when the time demands.

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the Rings" refuses to relinquish its grip. There is so much that is wrong and flabby with the book, but there is one big thing that Tolkien got right: he got rhythm. His instinct for the procedures of Dark Age saga was as reliable as his indifference to the mores of the machine age, and he soon established a beat—a basic pulse, throbbing below the surface of the book and forcing you, day after day, to turn the page. We can no more leave Frodo stranded on his mission than his friends can. Not all works of literature share that pulse: the Odyssey has it, "Ulysses" doesn't. This is a way of suggesting that "The Lord of the Rings" may be the final stab at epic, and there is invariably something risky, if not downright risible, in a last gasp. Tolkien believed that he could reproduce the epic form under modern conditions, and that there was no call to update the epic vocabulary; hence both the mockery that met his enterprise and the more charitable amazement that anyone could strive for such a thing. (Read the commentaries of Tolkien scholars and you find them plaintively torn between crying up his serious literary credentials and claiming him for a man of the people, an Aragorn-like leader who will outwit the snares of the élite.) It is a book that bristles with bravado, and yet to give in to it—to cave in to it, as most of us did on a first reading—betrays a certain nerdishness, a reluctance to face the finer shades of life, that verges on the cowardly. That is why boys have traditionally been fonder of it than girls, who are less fazed and flummoxed at the prospect of growing up; women leave their girlhood behind with a glance, whereas men keep looking over their shoulders at the vanishing Shire and asking themselves if it might still be possible, or proper, to head back to their hole in the ground. And so, against our better judgment, we will troop into the movie and start to replace the world outside with the more vibrant and momentous one within, the one that Tolkien taught us to prefer. Elbereth Gilthoniel! Cuio i Pherian annan! Elvish Lives! ♦

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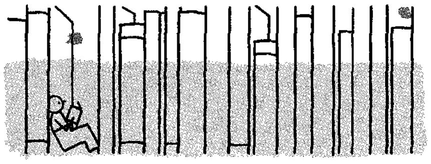


A Pitcher's Story, *by Roger Angell (Warner; $25.95).* When the Yankee right-hander David Cone lost his magic in his last year with the team, what had been planned as a book about baseball mastery turned into a book about baseball's difficulty. It's a better story, and one that shows off the talents of these formidable batterymates: Cone's focus and determination, Angell's ability to evoke the way that, sooner or later, the game breaks your heart.

Reading Chekhov, *by Janet Malcolm (Random House; $23.95).* The author's pilgrimage to Chekhov's Russia—Moscow, St. Petersburg, the gardens of his villa in Yalta—is a reunion with this most reticent of literary fathers. Malcolm analyzes the transformations that Chekhov grants his redeemable roués and guileless heroines, and illuminates the hidden surreality and waywardness of his realism.

The Metaphysical Club, *by Louis Menand (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $27).* A group portrait of four men—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., William James, Charles Peirce, and John Dewey—who changed the way America thought. Because Menand, like his subjects, views ideas as being "soaked through" by the situations we find them in, his book embraces everything from Darwin, probability theory, and the battle of Antietam to infighting at the University of Chicago.

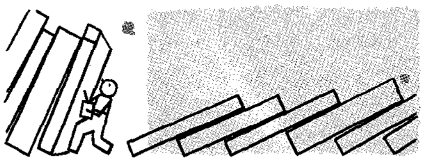
Double Fold, *by Nicholson Baker (Random House; $25.95).* An ardent call for America's libraries to preserve their newspaper collections. Baker is particularly effective in conveying the beauty of long-defunct illustrated and local papers—all in danger of being destroyed.

Babe in Paradise, *by Marisa Silver (Norton; $23.95).* This collection of stories is set in the city of angels, but Silver's stuntmen and limo drivers, living in the shadow of Hollywood, would count themselves lucky to catch just a glimpse of paradise.

Collected Poems, *by James Merrill, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser (Knopf; $40).* Merrill was and remains an incandescent spirit. There is a darting freshness in even his toughest poems, and in his ability to assume multiple guises: the jeweller of fine language; the local colorist; the lyric poet whose many lines about love—"a pearl whose cost / We doubt till it is bitten"—are some of the century's greatest.

The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression, *by Andrew Solomon (Scribner; $28).* The melancholic, Freud observed, has "a keener eye for the truth than others," and Solomon is a case in point. Interweaving personal experiences with scientific reporting, he has produced a meditation on the human capacity to suffer—but also to prevail.

The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup, *by Susan Orlean (Random House; $24.95).* Orlean's curiosity is in evidence everywhere in these portraits, whose subjects include Maui surfer girls, a Manhattan real-estate broker ("like Superman, she can see through walls"), and a young Dominican basketball player who "is growing so fast that he once failed to recognize his own pants."



Uncle Tungsten, *by Oliver Sacks (Knopf; $25).* As a child of wartime England, Sacks shored himself up against the horrors of the political world by learning all he could about the world of science. In this memoir, he emphasizes the sensuous dimensions of scientific inquiry.

Lost in Mongolia, *by Tad Friend (atrandom.com; $15).* Travel pieces occupy only a third of this eclectic collection: before Friend departs for Morocco, the Philippines, or the Basque region of Spain (where he witnesses a heavy-lifting contest and finds that he can't lift much), he trains his gaze on Hollywood and other mysteries of America, with hilarious results.

Was This Man a Genius? *by Julie Hecht (Random House; $23.95).* In the seventies, the author repeatedly attempted to interview the late Andy Kaufman, and fell prey to the confusion of life and art that marked his peculiar talent. Here Hecht returns the favor: in this account of her comic ordeal, she has created for her eccentric subject a final act.

Austerlitz, *by W. G. Sebald, translated from the German by Anthea Bell (Random House; $25.95).* When Austerlitz, a child of the Holocaust, recovers memories of his lost parents, he must find a way to reconstruct his own history—that is, to imagine the unimaginable. Such impossibilities are the purview of Sebald, who writes about the conundrums of memory in such a way that we feel ourselves to be inhabited by his characters, rather than the other way around.

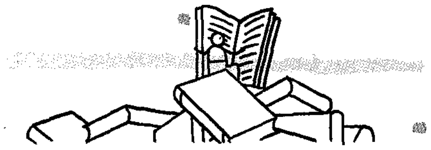
Against Love Poetry, *by Eavan Boland (Norton; $21).* These poems of an enduring, unromanticized marriage—"Where are the lives we lived / when we were young?"—can be surreptitiously passionate. Boland's loyalty to the plain words that call forth a whole past keeps the peat fires burning decades after they were lit.

A Cold Case, *by Philip Gourevitch (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22).* In 1970, Frankie Koehler shot and killed two men after a barroom brawl in Hell's Kitchen and then disappeared; twenty-seven years later, Andy Rosenzweig, the chief investigator for the Manhattan D.A., set out to solve one last case before he retired. Gourevitch reconstructs not only the crime but an era of cops and criminals that's fast passing into myth.

Perfect Recall, *by Ann Beattie (Scribner; $25).* From the steadfast chronicler of modern malaise, these tales set the dramas of fraying romantic ties alongside the (no less devastating) platonic bargains that men and women make as hedges against loneliness. Beattie's characters, like the Vietnam vet in one story, find they must weather "the revenge of the ordinary world."

The Dog Department, *by James Thurber, edited by Michael J. Rosen (HarperCollins; $32).* This omnibus brings together the artist's signature hounds with previously uncollected material. Thurber disdained "sentimental woofumpoofum," and his unpoetic dogs, with their expressive ears and baffled faces, surprise us with a vision of our sloppy selves.

The Chosen One, *by David Owen (Simon & Schuster; $21).* After Tiger Woods won the British Open last year, the South African golfer Ernie Els joked, "Maybe make the holes bigger for us and a little smaller for him." Owen explores the ways in which Woods's outsized accomplishments have transformed not only his own game but everyone else's.



Looking for History, *by Alma Guillermoprieto (Pantheon; $25).* The author covers Latin American politics with characteristic but deceptive modesty; her ability to place Zapatista guerrillas and Colombian drug-financed paramilitaries in their specific historical context adds a skeptical, humanizing perspective to the current events she describes.

Jack Cole and Plastic Man, *by Art Spiegelman and Chip Kidd (Chronicle; $19.95).* Jack Cole's manic Plastic Man—a rubbery superhero of the forties and fifties, capable of stretching and bending into virtually anything—was a true comic-book innovation. Cole killed himself in 1958; here Spiegelman's analysis and Kidd's layout set the joy of vintage episodes against the despair of their creator.

The Music at Long Verney, *by Sylvia Townsend Warner (Counterpoint; $24).* "Though it was news to her that she had the soul of an artist, she accepted the revelation," Warner writes, in a story about an aging contralto. The description fits the author as well. In these previously uncollected stories, published between 1929 and 1977, the revelation is often oblique, arriving in a conversation, a book, or even a piece of music.

After the Plague, *by T. C. Boyle (Viking; $25.95).* This collection is uproarious and unforgiving: "She Wasn't Soft," the title of one story, says it all. If Boyle finds dark humor in the lives of peeping toms, he also writes with tenderness about a widow waiting "for something she can't name."

Talk Stories, *by Jamaica Kincaid (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $23).* These pieces, published between 1974 and 1983, display Kincaid's knack for recording the perfect absurdity at a press conference, or the best line at a party: "Sensation, as you know, is the tyranny of Los Angeles."

The Corrections, *by Jonathan Franzen (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $26).* A sprawling novel about the diaspora of the modern American family: Enid and Alfred have carved their lives out of the suburban Midwest bedrock—hard work, shrimp cocktail, and silent sex—but their children live in New York and Philadelphia, eat wild Norwegian salmon, experiment with bisexuality, and study Foucault. Franzen gives us a tragicomic portrait of a flawed nation with the equally flawed notion of perfectibility at its heart.

Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage, *by Alice Munro (Knopf; $24).* These stories examine the dance between the sexes—from playing in the mud to rolling in the hay to consigning a partner's ashes to the ground. Throughout, Munro's moves are as intricate and startling as the rituals she transcribes are inevitable.

The Diaries of Kenneth Tynan, *edited by John Lahr (Bloomsbury; $32.95).* "Life is a bountiful murderer," the doomed critic wrote in 1973, and certainly there is a sense here of both persecution and squandered blessings. Yet Tynan's entries—on sex, God, theatre gossip, and the sins of the Tory Party—remain sharp and stylish to the end, as his wit, rage, and ambition jockey for position.

Fierce Pajamas: An Anthology of Humor Writing from The New Yorker ($27.95) has been published by Random House; The New Yorker Book of Kids Cartoons has been published by Bloomberg ($21.95); and The Fun of It: Stories from The Talk of the Town has been published by Modern Library ($15.95).

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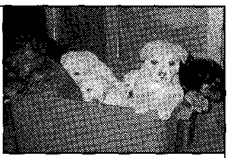

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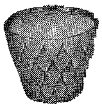

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MUSICAL EVENTS

INTIMATE VOICES

The renewal of the song recital.

BY ALEX ROSS

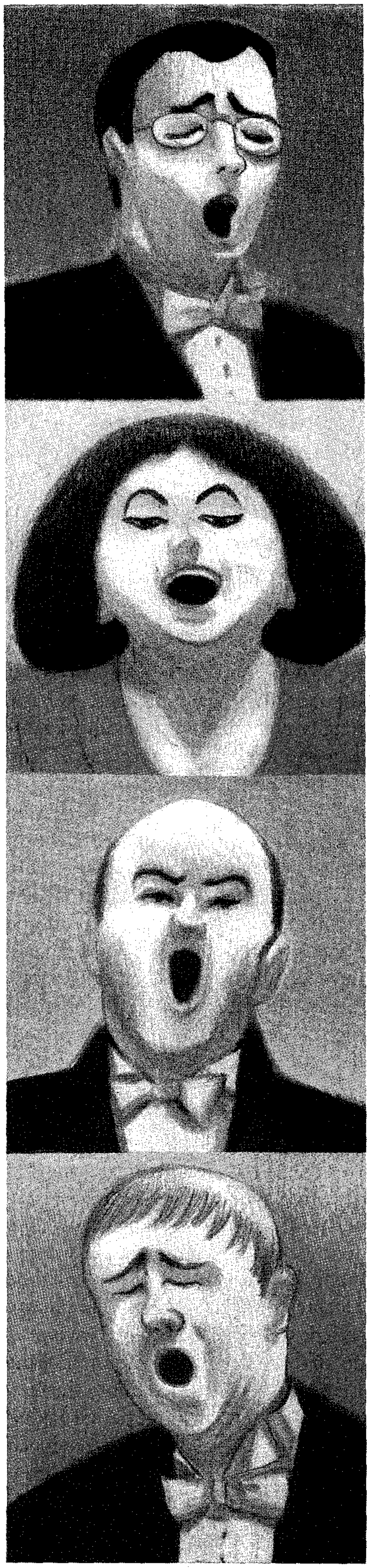
"The great myth of our times is that technology is communication," the composer Libby Larsen wrote in a program note for a wryly hip song called "Jazz at the Intergalactic Nightclub," which the tenor Robert White sang the other night. "By putting up an enormous barrier between human beings," Larsen went on, "technology makes us yearn for the intimacy that a live performance of a song can give." These words articulate a feeling that comes over me whenever I go to a vocal recital in one of New York's smaller, more singer-friendly halls, such as Weill, the Walter Reade, or the auditorium at the Frick Collection. The artist is only a few feet away, looking listeners in the eyes. The closeness can be unnerving, because we have been conditioned to experience music in solitude—as an amenity, a blanket for the self, a drug that sedates or stimulates as the mood demands. Recitals, by contrast, are controlled riots of communication. We listen to great singers as we would to a friend who is confessing something against his better instincts.

For whatever reason, vocal programs have shot up in number and quality in the past few years. The phenomenon has stemmed in part from an influx of talent: so many compelling baritones, mezzos, and light-voiced tenors have popped up that the names have begun to blur. In the weeks before and after Thanksgiving, various of them descended on New York en masse. On a Thursday, Steven Blier, the co-director of the New York Festival of Song, accompanied Vivica Genaux and Jennifer Aylmer in a dizzying variety of music from the Iberian Peninsula. On a Friday, the Clark Kent-ish countertenor Andreas Scholl sang a program of English, Italian, and Spanish lute songs at Weill. The next night, Renée Fleming appeared at Carnegie Hall, but I went instead to the Metropolitan Museum, to hear White's program of new American songs, all of them world premières. The following afternoon, at Alice Tully Hall, the dusky-voiced contralto Ewa Podleś mesmerized a crowd of fans with selections of Rachmaninoff and Mussorgsky. After the holiday, Sanford Sylvan tackled Schubert's "Winterreise," as part of the formidable Music Before 1800 series, at Corpus Christi Church.

If these singers had anything in common, it was vividness. They had a way of pouncing on isolated moments in the songs and rendering them as epiphanies. Scholl, for example, took John Dowland's famous phrase, "In darkness let me dwell," and eased it out of silence with a silken, clarinet-like tone. White brought clarion diction to William Bolcom's setting of the Auden poem "September 1, 1939," spitting out the word "obsessing" with the high-handed disgust of a renegade priest. Podleś was riveting in every number, but particularly in Rachmaninoff's "She Is as Beautiful as Noon," which compares unrequited love to the crashing of the ocean on a silent shore. She imposed a monumental crescendo on the climactic E-flat, letting it build like a wave that would sweep everything before it—until, of course, it ended. Accompanists are capable of epiphanies, too: Blier's incisive way with rhythm tied together his madly eclectic Spanish program, which he illustrated with charming, edifying patter from the stage. ("I wrote before I Googled," he said of a tiny error in the program.)

Contemporary singers have drifted from the philosophy set down by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who dominated the lieder business after the Second World War. Fischer-Dieskau tended to interpret line by line, mediating between the sometimes contradictory demands of poetry and music. A more instinctive singer like Sylvan searches out the governing mood of a song or a cycle and channels it in an almost trancelike fashion. This approach seems, in a way, more reflective of the spontaneity of

Schubert, who would often use a single image to generate the principal musical material of a song (the last leaves of autumn falling, a dog rattling its chain). Sylvan's rendition of "Winterreise" was very austere, with the velvety smoothness of his baritone supplemented by passages of conversational roughness. David Breitman, accompanying him on a tangy fortepiano, stripped away all vestiges of sentimental melancholy and underlined the striding rhythm. At a few scattered, unpredictable climaxes, Sylvan hit tones of Wagnerian grandeur, showing Schubert's wintertime walker as something more than a pitiable person on the verge of death. His traveller begins by feeling victimized in love and ends by raging against the world. I have never heard "Winterreise" taken quite so fearlessly for what it really is—a document of insanity.


Potent songsters (from top): Scholl, Podleś, Sylvan, and White.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

By now, of course, the scary genius of Schubert has been examined from every possible angle. The present vitality of the song scene has come not so much from fresh approaches to the classics but from a wholesale renovation of the repertory. Free of the fearfulness that deadens orchestral programming, singers hit us with such unexpected fare as "Soneto a Manuel de Falla," by the Spanish surrealist Xavier Montsalvatge (courtesy of the New York Festival of Song), and "Have You Seen the Bright Lily Grow?," by the Jacobean lutenist Robert Johnson (a generous gift from Scholl). Lieder singers can also take advantage of the fact that the minor masters of late Romanticism breathed more easily in the open air of the lied than in the overgrown forest of Brahmsian sonata form. The CPO label's survey of the songs of Hans Pfitzner, for example, which employs the splendid German singers Christoph Prégardien and Andreas Schmidt, radiates an eerie, lunar beauty, little of which comes through in Pfitzner's C-Sharp-Minor Quartet. Even part-time composers and dilettantes have songs worth hearing. You could put together a passable program from the vocal works of Alma Mahler, Bruno Walter, Bertolt Brecht, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce.

And then there is the furious activity in contemporary song, which may be the hidden motor of the entire solo-vocal renaissance. A couple of decades ago, singers would make contact with new music only if they made a career of it: specialists like Bethany Beardslee and Jan De Gaetani trained their voices to leap up and down in Schoenbergian ninths and thirteenths. The New York Festival of Song has broken the pattern by taking twentieth-century American song as its center of gravity, installing Gershwin in the Schubert shrine and commissioning shockingly singable cycles from Ned Rorem and Lowell Liebermann. A growing band of composers have turned to a kind of pop neoclassicism, blending Coplandesque Americana with jazz and Broadway stylings, which international stars on the order of Renée Fleming, Frederica von Stade, and Sylvia McNair have featured on their programs. That a relatively unheralded composer like Jake Heggie could obtain all three of these celebrities for his début disk, on BMG, suggests how desperately singers are in need of new music that falls easily on the voice.

Right now, a lot of this work is more likable in theory than in practice. Ricky Ian Gordon's songs stand out for their bright, agile tone, but many of the others blend together. At minimum, they are establishing a beachhead in singers' and listeners' sympathies; vernacular realism seems to be the next wave in American music, and bigger things will follow. The song renaissance has already liberated at least one composer who had got stuck in the blowsy "new romanticism" of a decade ago: David Del Tredici is no longer producing "Alice in Wonderland" tone poems and is instead writing songs in a grippingly personal voice. His recent disk on CRI, "Secret Music," may be the best new-music album of the year, and his setting of Edna St. Vincent Millay's "What Lips My Lips Have Kissed" was the prize of Robert White's cavalcade of premières. The opening motif recalled Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," but it kept twisting around in an unsettled, extended tonality. Toward the end, the music landed majestically in the sun-filled key of D major, but in the last few bars it wheeled back toward darkness, with a dying fall, and White's voice tapered to nothing. The sense of finality was so strong that you wanted a curtain to come down, but there were many more songs to go. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

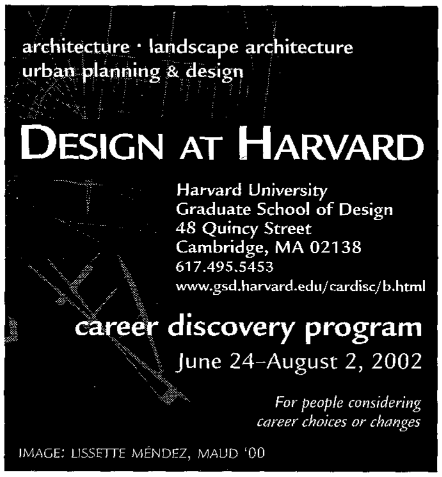
DECEIVERS

A Rat Pack remake, and a journey to Kandahar.

BY DAVID DENBY

Steven Soderbergh's new version of "Ocean's Eleven"—the famously lazy heist movie from 1960 starring Frank Sinatra and the rest of the Rat Pack—is great fun for about an hour or so. But then, as the movie races through its final tricks and plot reversals, it falls away from us, losing our interest, and by the end we may wonder why anyone bothered to remake something so slight to begin with. The new picture is roughly equivalent to an old Ford Fairlane commercial reconceived for an Imax screen. Soderbergh has described the original as "probably more notorious than it is good," by which he means, perhaps, that its reputation as a cool movie has always seemed odd. Forty years ago, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., Peter Lawford, and Joey Bishop were among the most popular entertainers in the country. How can you be cool when you're at the very heart of the establishment? (J.F.K. pulled it off, but he was the *President*.) Maybe the Rat Pack seemed hip because they were too rich and successful to care what anyone thought of them. "Ocean's Eleven" was the first movie in which the gang appeared together, and they went on to make such casually lousy comedies as "Sergeants Three" and "Robin and the Seven Hoods." These pictures let you in on the nattering inside jokes of the top bananas. The guys just hung out together, and, watching them, men and women might have felt that they, too, could be accepted into the inner circle. Jaunty self-possession can charm anyone it doesn't completely turn off. In "Ocean's Eleven," the fellows walk onto the sets, arms swinging, as if they were taking over a night-club stage. There's not much pretense that they're playing roles—Dino noodles at the piano, and Sammy belts out a number on the street with friends. "Ocean's Eleven" is mainly interesting today as a disinterred time capsule of period clothes and sexual attitudes: there are the solid-color cardigans and narrow black ties; the copious drinks poured neat; the cigarettes thoughtfully smoked, as if they contained wisdom that could be dragged out of them; the pushy women quickly disposed of. Most of the jokes are witty in the way that almost anything becomes witty after a drink or two, though Shirley MacLaine has a genuinely memorable cameo as a sloshed party girl. Sinatra is edgy and intense, but the best thing in the picture is Dean Martin's sleepy, postcoital line readings—which he might have turned into a major acting style, if he had cared to.

Soderbergh may have wanted to show up the old movie's self-satisfaction. His version, from a screenplay by Ted Griffin, is also just fluff, but most of it has been put together with tension and energetic skill—it's fluff with electronic circuits buried in its folds. Soderbergh and Jerry Weintraub, the producer, have assembled a star cast whose members had no particular connection to one another—not a rat pack but a bunch of Hollywood pros. George Clooney plays the Sinatra role, Danny Ocean, a smarty-pants thief who emerges from prison with a plan to knock over the casinos at the Bellagio, the Mirage, and the MGM Grand, three enormous Vegas hotels owned, in the movie, by a snake named Terry Benedict (Andy Garcia). Clooney is dry, precise, ironic, and one step ahead of everybody; it's his most dominating performance yet. Brief vignettes set up the others: Brad Pitt as a bored cardsharp; Matt Damon as a pickpocket, drearily working the Chicago El; Don Cheadle as a Cockney explosives expert; and so on. Not all of this works. Cheadle, for instance, almost chokes on his accent, and I couldn't distinguish Damon's sombre personality in this movie from what it's been in five other movies. But two of the gang stand out as fresh creations. Elliott Gould, as the deposed Vegas mogul Reuben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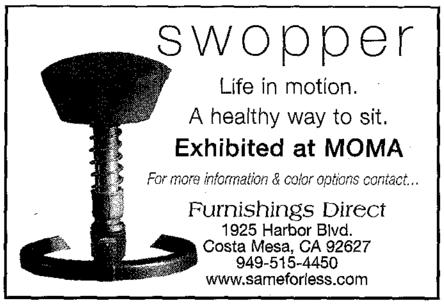
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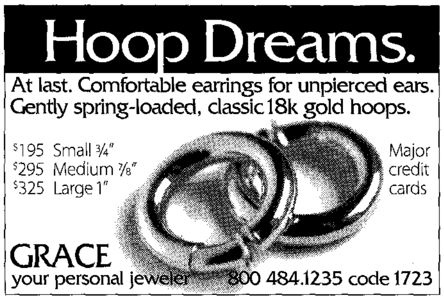
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Tishkoff, vegetates noisily beside his pool in matching paisley trunks and robe. With his oversized glasses, his big cigar, his medallions nesting in thatched chest hair, Gould, who has been all but invisible onscreen recently, has contributed an immortal bit to the history of caricature—his gay Jewish gangster is pure, corrupt Vegas classicism. And Carl Reiner, pushing eighty, plays a retired con man who is called back from Florida inaction for one last, magnificent effort. Reiner's cheeks sag with disgust at what age has done to him; he's marvellously dyspeptic, as grumpy as an arthritic horse, but still capable of speed when he draws near the finish line.

George Clooney takes on Frank Sinatra's role in the new "Ocean's Eleven."

TOM BACHTELL

Most of Lewis Milestone's direction of the original was poky and flat—the Rat Pack stood around in a group waiting for something to happen. This is a much more attentive and intricate job of moviemaking, with lines of terse narrative winging on and off the screen and perfectly fitted together. You see the guys rehearse the heist, with voice-over narration. Then you see the robbery itself, which depends on many interlocking pieces of theatre—moments of imposture and fakery that allow the gang members to get into the inner sanctums of the casinos. It's as if they were all staging a play; Soderbergh even rivals David Mamet, in his recent "Heist," as a connoisseur of deception. Both movies offer a pleasant show-business view of crime, in which larceny and theatrical games are practically indistinguishable, and almost no one gets seriously hurt. The money that the robbers walk away with at the end is virtually symbolic—the reward for putting on a good show.

There's pleasure to be had in speed and finesse like this, though there isn't so much as a pinprick of cultural significance. There has been a lot of retro fascination with the fifties swinger era of late, but Soderbergh doesn't plug into any of it. His sets are from the newer, safer, "family" Vegas—from the era of terrible good taste rather than the gold-lamé, Sands-and-Flamingo era of superb bad taste. And he ignores the pre-feminist atmosphere of male camaraderie and the big-band standards that seemed to fuel a seductive, teasing way with women, and are, in part, what has continued to draw young men to the Rat Pack mystique. Soderbergh must at least have shared their awe for the anthropological wonder of old Vegas, but he knows it doesn't work anymore, so he takes the high road.

It turns out that Danny Ocean has lost his extraordinary wife, Tess (Julia Roberts), to Terry Benedict and wants to take his money and win her back at the same time. Tess is some sort of munificently dressed art expert who works as the Bellagio's "curator." Roberts is a good sport, and she brings some bite to her scenes with Clooney, but we can't figure out why such a classy lady would hang out with safecrackers and casino owners—her temperament doesn't fit her plot function—and we wonder what exactly she'll be getting if Clooney does win his battle. A successful thief? Casting around for something to motivate his story, Soderbergh falls into half-hearted nonsense. The movie has no climax, no payoff that matters. "Ocean's Eleven" is the most confidently professional work Soderbergh has ever done, but it's also the least adventuresome and emotionally vital. It vanishes faster than a shot of bourbon.

"Kandahar," the latest film by the Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf ("Gabbeh"), couldn't be better timed. Makhmalbaf set the film in Afghanistan but shot it on the Iranian border, where the dry, brown, featureless turf easily passes for the real thing. The story is just a series of gestures: Nafas (Nelofer Pazira), an English-speaking Afghan woman who left the country as a teen-ager, returns to look for her sister, who is in a state of despair and is threatening to commit suicide. Kandahar is where she wants to get to, but Kandahar is also a state of mind—the locus of the Talibanic dispensation, in which sanctity overlays extreme poverty and everyone struggles to appear virtuous while trying to survive. So much of life is regulated in Afghanistan that most of the characters disguise themselves in some way in order to escape persecution: men hide under burkas; a benevolent African-American do-gooder, posing as a doctor, wears a false beard; a little boy who seems to have trouble reciting the Koran in the head-bobbing exercises at religious school escapes and turns into a tough little hustler scurrying across the sands. As Nafas seeks help in her quest, the sequences bump into one another without much continuity, but continuity may not be the point for Makhmalbaf. What he has done is turn the desolation of Afghanistan into scenes of iconic power. The repeated motif of "Kandahar" is the flimsy new plastic and wooden legs made for the many who have lost their limbs to land mines. Men bargain for them, barter them, and, at one point, the legs drop out of the sky, suspended from Red Cross parachutes—an image, mixing hope and grotesque comedy, that is worthy of Fellini or Buñuel. "Kandahar" is abrupt and fragmentary, but powerful. ◆

POP MUSIC

THE ROYALS

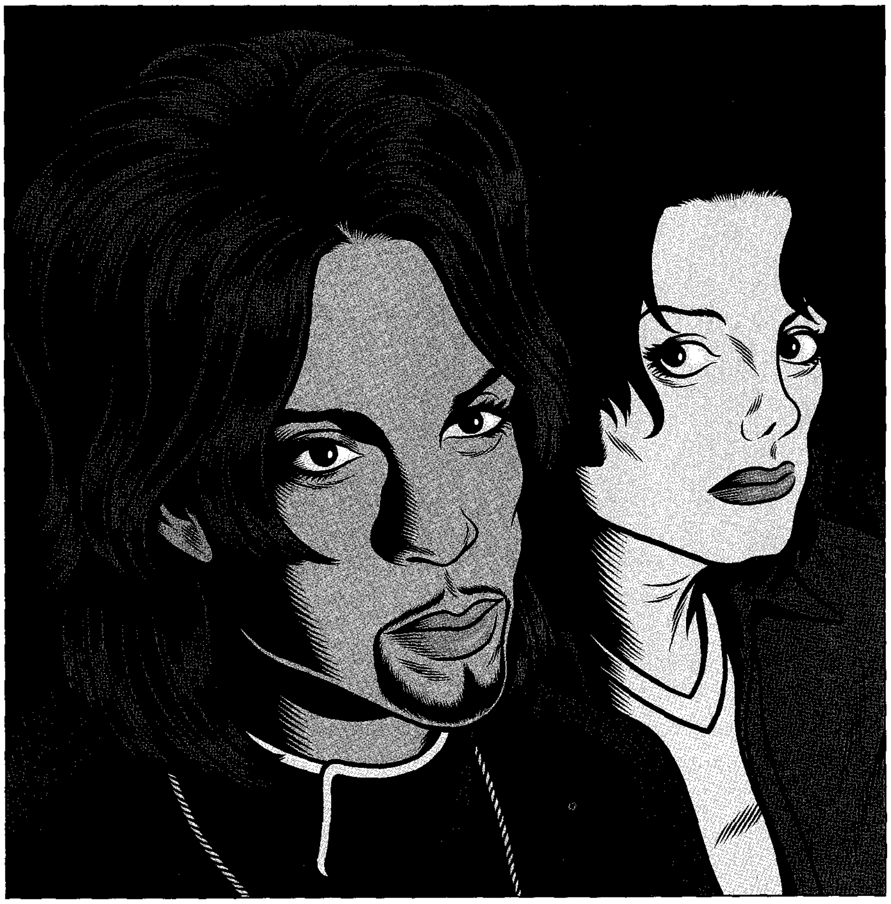
Prince believes in God; the King of Pop doesn't even believe in himself.

BY BEN GREENMAN

For a few years there, it looked as though Prince wasn't a musician at all but an entrepreneur suffering the most painful of plights: failure. In the eighties, the Minneapolis-born pop polymath dominated the charts and the critics with a string of brilliant, sometimes bawdy hit records: "Dirty Mind," "1999," "Purple Rain," "Sign 'O' the Times." But in the early nineties, miserable about his recording contract with Warner Bros., he changed his name to an unpronounceable glyph, took to scrawling "Slave" on his cheek with face paint, and began to lecture on the parallels between major-label recording artists and bond servants. The complaints had a spiritual and a political dimension, but Prince's gripe was primarily economic: what galled him above all else was the fact that record labels traditionally retain the rights to an artist's master recordings. He even coined a catchy intellectual-property slogan: "If you don't own the masters, the master owns you."

This gospel of self-determination resulted in a series of get-liberated-quick schemes. Prince tried self-distribution, online sales, and even a limited partnership with a major label, teaming up with Clive Davis and Arista for the release of the 1999 album "Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic." All his schemes went belly up, some more spectacularly than others: an ambitious plan to create note-for-note clones of his entire catalogue, thereby offering consumers an alternative set of masters, stalled after only one song. Earlier this year, after reclaiming his name, Prince launched yet another enterprise, the New Power Generation Music Club, an online service that, for a modest monthly fee, allows fans to download new and unreleased material to their home computers—a new single here and there, live versions of popular Prince songs, remixes.

Then came "The Rainbow Children," Prince's twenty-third album, give or take, in twenty-three years, which appeared on the Web site in October and in stores in November. Unlike "Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic," which was a largely forgettable collection of pop songs that seemed designed to prove that Prince was still a chart force—and, in fizzling, proved the opposite—"The Rainbow Children" is an album in the classic sense of the word, a seventy-minute suite that comprises R. & B. ballads, funk workouts, instrumental interludes, and even sermonizing. Prince recently adopted the tenets of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and "The Rainbow Children" is filled with lengthy monologues delivered in a computer-modulated basso profundo. The opening speech gives a fairly representative taste of what is to come:



Prince's life and Michael Jackson's have been like the strands of a double helix.

CHARLES BURNS

> With the accurate understanding of God and His law they went about the work of building a new nation: The Rainbow Children. The Wise One who understood the law that was handed down from God long ago reflected the true meaning 2 his woman every day and she surrendered her discerning of it in2 his care and keeping 4 she trusted he would lead in the right way. Her children in subjection 2 her, she in subjection 2 the Wise One, and the Wise One in subjection 2 the only begotten one, all 4ever in subjection 2 God.

Happily, the music isn't as cumbrous as the rhetoric. Working mostly as a one-man band, Prince sets down a bass figure that wouldn't have been out of place on Dave Brubeck's "Time Out," adds a layer of burbling guitar, and tops off the arrangement with a joyful chorus that sounds as if it were being sung by a regional company of "Hair." The jazz inflections, at least, are a good sign. The last time Prince dabbled openly in jazz was the late eighties, when he routinely covered Charlie Parker's "Now's the Time" in concert, collaborated with Miles Davis, and produced some of his finest music. In the years since, he's been more concerned about keeping pace with hip-hop, and the results have been generally slack. It's also clear that this record marks the return of Prince as guitarist, a relief for those who feared that he would forever limit himself to dropsical solos like the one in "Purple Rain." Here he plays mad-rush rock chords, delicate jazz runs, and metronomic funk—all in the same song.

For a little while after that strong start, it looks as though Prince's eccentricity might get the better of him. The mid-tempo love song "Muse 2 the Pharaoh" is both generous and incomprehensible: after pledging to a woman that "there is nothing he wouldn't give her," Prince bemoans the world's reliance on "berries, talons, arrows and stars" and notes that "the opposite of NATO is OTAN." What follows is even airier: "The Work Pt. 1," an enjoyable if insubstantial James Brown pastiche; "Everywhere," a busy show tune that celebrates Prince's enlightenment; and "Mellow," a plum-colored ballad that—well, celebrates Prince's enlightenment.

But the last half hour of "The Rainbow Children" takes wing. The ascension begins subtly, with "She Loves Me 4 Me," a sweet little love song that seems to clear Prince's palate; then comes a pair of funk songs, "Family Name" and "The Everlasting Now," each more than eight minutes long, and each unimpeachable. Prince has always produced his own records, but not always well; "Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic" was particularly disappointing, festooned with guest stars and superfluous effects. Here everything works, from the tapestry of guitar textures in "Family Name" to the fuzzy and deeply funky bass that kicks off "The Everlasting Now." The drumming deserves special mention: like many studio wizards, Prince has often relied on drum machines, but, as Sheila E. proved back in the late eighties and John Blackwell reiterates here, there's no substitute for a flesh-and-blood drummer who can move from stutter-funk to Latin rhythms to straight-ahead rock and roll. The overall sound is warm and welcoming; not only do the songs sound lived in but they sound as if Prince had lived in them long enough to decorate.

In this final stretch, it also becomes clear that "The Rainbow Children" is as much a collection of essays as it is a pop album. At times, the lyrics tilt toward the mystical ("Family Name" opens with a coy reference to the Akashic record, which the theosophists thought comprised all past and future experience); elsewhere, they are laughably didactic ("Don't let nobody bring u down / Accurate knowledge of Christ and the Father / Will bring the Everlasting Now"). But there's also some European history (assuming that the "devil" who has "been here since 1914" is the spectre of world war), biography ("The Everlasting Now" includes verse-long lives of Little Richard and Sly Stone), and sociology ("Family Name" ends with a snippet of a Martin Luther King, Jr., speech). There's a rebelliousness in this specificity: if the Prince of the early eighties could shock fans by singing about oral sex and incest, the Prince of the new millennium shocks by singing about faith and politics. Near the end of "The Everlasting Now," Prince acknowledges that "The Rainbow Children" may be a hard sell. "You know," he says, mimicking the pinched tones of a critical fan, "this is funky, but I just wish he'd play like he used to, old scragglyhead." The response is the sharp report of a slap.

The album should have ended with that slap. The anthemlike finale, "Last December," is less grating than past Prince anthems, thanks in large part to an astounding guitar solo, but it still feels staged. If Prince is no longer playing for the suits and the seats, if he's just delivering the music in his head and demonstrating his allegiance to his God, then why end the record with a big showstopping number? Is it possible that when he searched his soul he found an entertainer?

Prince and Michael Jackson have always had lives that were like the strands of a double helix. Both were born in 1958, within three months of each other. Back in the early eighties, Jackson topped the charts with "Thriller" just before Prince did the same with "Purple Rain." Jackson's 1987 hit "Bad" was originally supposed to be a duet with Prince. And even Prince's recent conversion to the Jehovah's Witnesses echoes Jackson, who was raised in the faith and practiced it until 1987.

Jackson's "Invincible," engineered over

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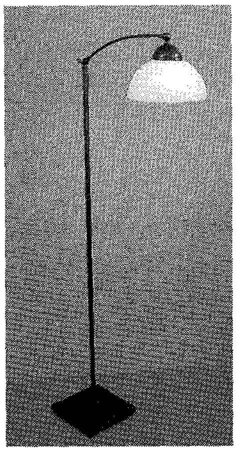

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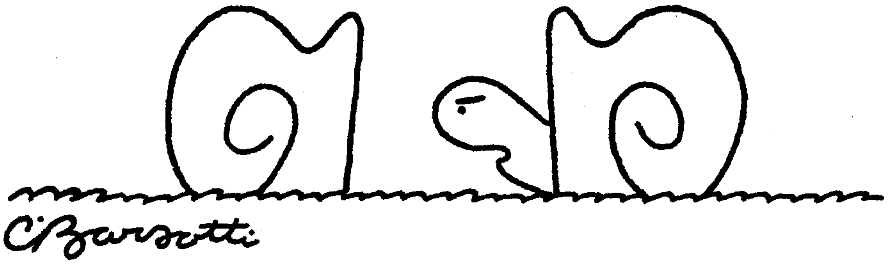

"Well, I want to talk."

• •

the course of the past decade for the space-program sum of thirty million dollars and finally released at the end of October, is his first album of entirely new material since 1991. He has spent the last decade generating headlines instead of music, thanks to the endless cosmetic surgery that turned his face into that of a dressmaker's dummy, the laughably public marriages and mysteriously sired children, and dozens of other well-documented incidences of increasingly erratic behavior.

This year, as the release of "Invincible" approached, Jackson took to shooting himself in the foot, over and over, as if to test the limits of the superstardom he has enjoyed since he was a child. First, he mounted a pair of absurdly mismanaged self-tribute concerts at Madison Square Garden, where long stretches of dead space alternated with testimonials by such wax-museum favorites as Liza Minnelli and Elizabeth Taylor. Then Jackson hastily threw together a tribute single to benefit the families of victims of the September 11th tragedy; other stars that he insisted would contribute vocals to the song, such as Britney Spears, denied that they would be participating.

As he stumbled, Jackson's new music began to leak to the radio. The album's long-awaited first single, "You Rock My World," rocked no one's world, despite a flashy music video featuring the comedian Chris Tucker and the inadvertent comedian Marlon Brando. It's easy to see why: there's bounce in the beats, but the silky-smooth chorus has no traction. Critics rushed to pan the album, which managed to sell almost six hundred thousand copies in its first two weeks—huge for most artists but only fair to middling for the self-declared King of Pop. The record's success isn't just a matter of bragging rights: Jackson supposedly financed "Invincible" in part with loans from Sony Music, and if he doesn't sell millions of records he stands to lose portions of his vast music-publishing holdings, which include much of the Beatles' catalogue.

It's not surprising that Jackson has drawn fire from the press; his hubris demands it. What is surprising is that the album is far from a disaster. "Unbreakable," the first song, has a jabbing piano line and a sticky melody; on the title track, he chops the word "invincible" into its four syllables with a precision that borders on malice. The ballads are even better. "Butterflies" has a vapid lepidopteral lyric, more Mariah Carey than Nabokov, but Jackson's vocals are astonishing: over a muted, descending horn line, he works the upper edge of his falsetto. There are many great mysteries of our age; one of them is how a man who is so patently artificial can still deliver an entirely genuine performance. It's there again on "Cry," which was written by the R. & B. singer and producer R. Kelly and features a cresting gospel chorus, and on "Whatever Happens," a ballad with spooky spaghetti-Western whistling and a typically liquid Carlos Santana solo. Each time Jackson hits his mark, it reminds you why you couldn't stop watching him when he stepped in

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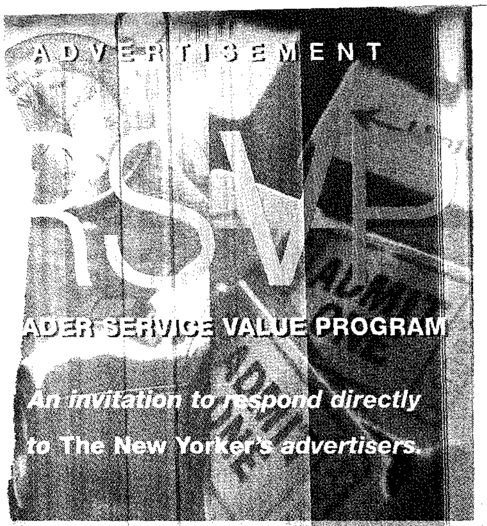
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front of his brothers and belted out the opening verse to "I Want You Back."

Elsewhere, the news is not as good. While the ballads are sung, and sometimes sung quite well, many of the uptempo songs are expectorated: Jackson likes to show his muscle by gritting his teeth and spitting out angry half words. And he has the bite to match his bark: throughout the record, he has greedily commandeered the music of other artists to shore up his own comeback. "Unbreakable" features a rap cameo by the hip-hop star Biggie Smalls, which may surprise those who are aware that Smalls has been dead for almost five years; the rap, as it turns out, originally appeared on a little-heard record by the basketball star Shaquille O'Neal. And the grinding "2000 Watts" was slated to be the title song for a record by the R. & B. singer Tyrese, who co-wrote the track, before Jackson expressed an interest. What the King of Pop wants the King of Pop gets.

But what does the King of Pop want? Following the clues on "Invincible" is a maddening, sometimes hilarious process. Why on earth would anyone name two songs on the same record "Invincible" and "Unbreakable"? That's like following "Beat It" with a song called "Get Lost." Why would anyone supplement immensely costly album art, including a photo portfolio by Albert Watson, with a napkin doodle by the famed spoonbender Uri Geller? The worst offender, if not the worst song, is the final track, "Threatened," which desperately tries to re-create "Thriller"-like atmospherics, right down to a stitched-together Rod Serling monologue that echoes Vincent Price's appearance on the earlier work. Chilly and cheerless, "Threatened" is perhaps the best example of Jackson's diminished humanity and the best way to differentiate his music from Prince's. "Invincible," for all its successes, is stringently commercial and sometimes unstrung, while "The Rainbow Children," for all its self-indulgence and meandering, is grounded in musical and spiritual faith, genuinely suggestive of community. After twenty years of eying each other's moves, Jackson and Prince have released albums only three weeks apart. Tellingly, though, they were the three weeks between Halloween and Thanksgiving. ♦

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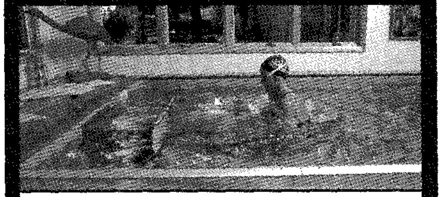

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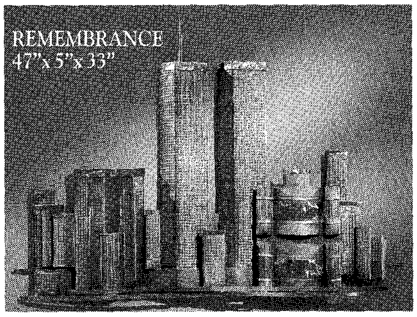

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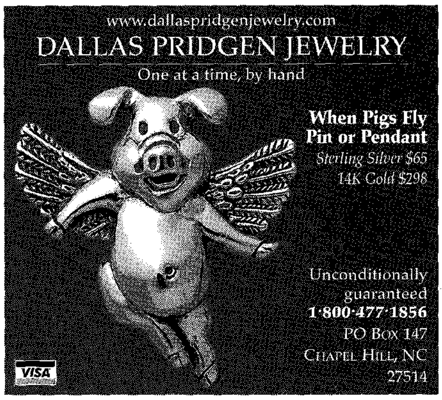
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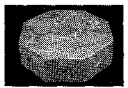
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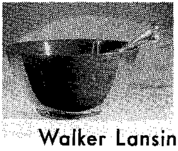

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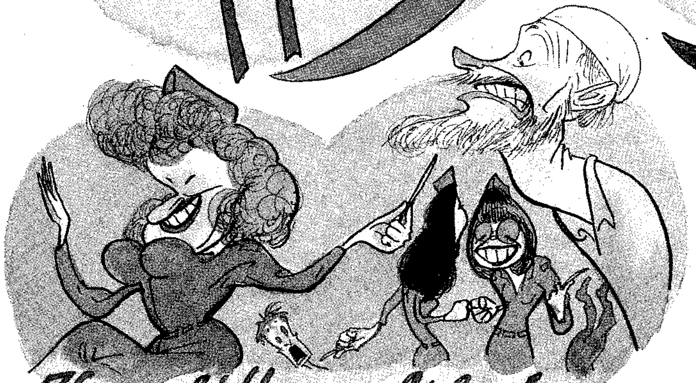
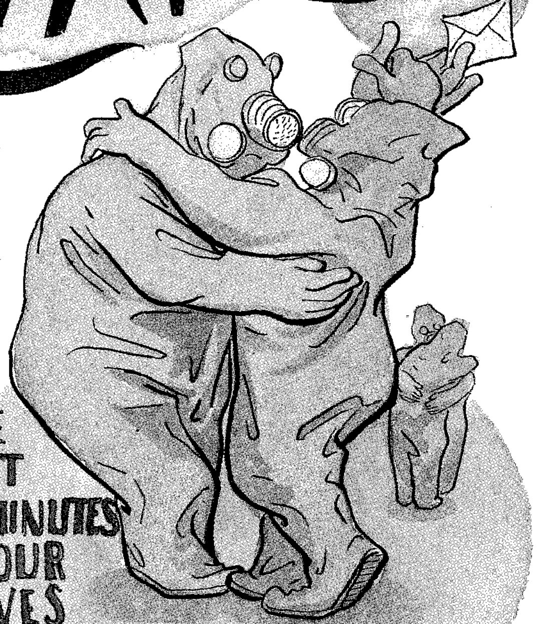


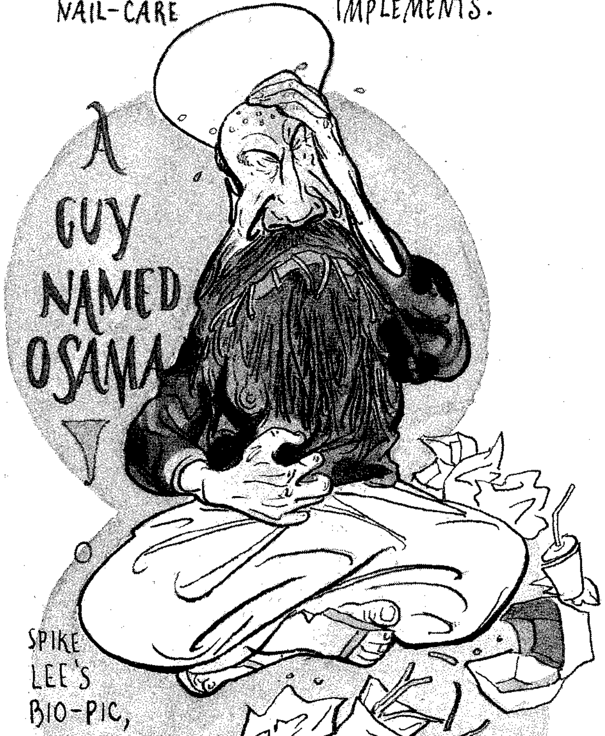
Three Jills in a Jihad

BETTE MIDLER, DIANE KEATON, AND CHER ARE SPECIAL-OPS AGENTS IN AFGHANISTAN WHO ROUT TERRORISTS BY USING VERY SHARP NAIL-CARE IMPLEMENTS.



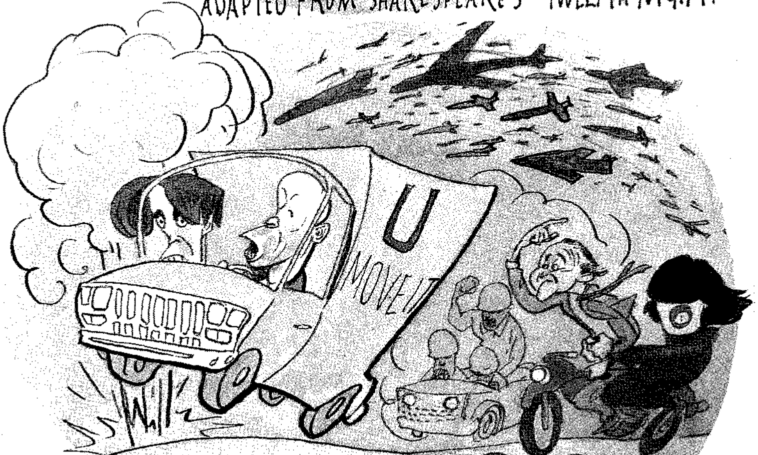
THE BEST 25 MINUTES OF OUR LIVES

TOM HANKS, DREW BARRYMORE, BEN STILLER, AND ANGELINA JOLIE ARE WORKERS WEARING BIOHAZARD SUITS WHO FALL IN LOVE BUT CAN'T IDENTIFY EACH OTHER. ADAPTED FROM SHAKESPEARE'S "TWELFTH NIGHT."



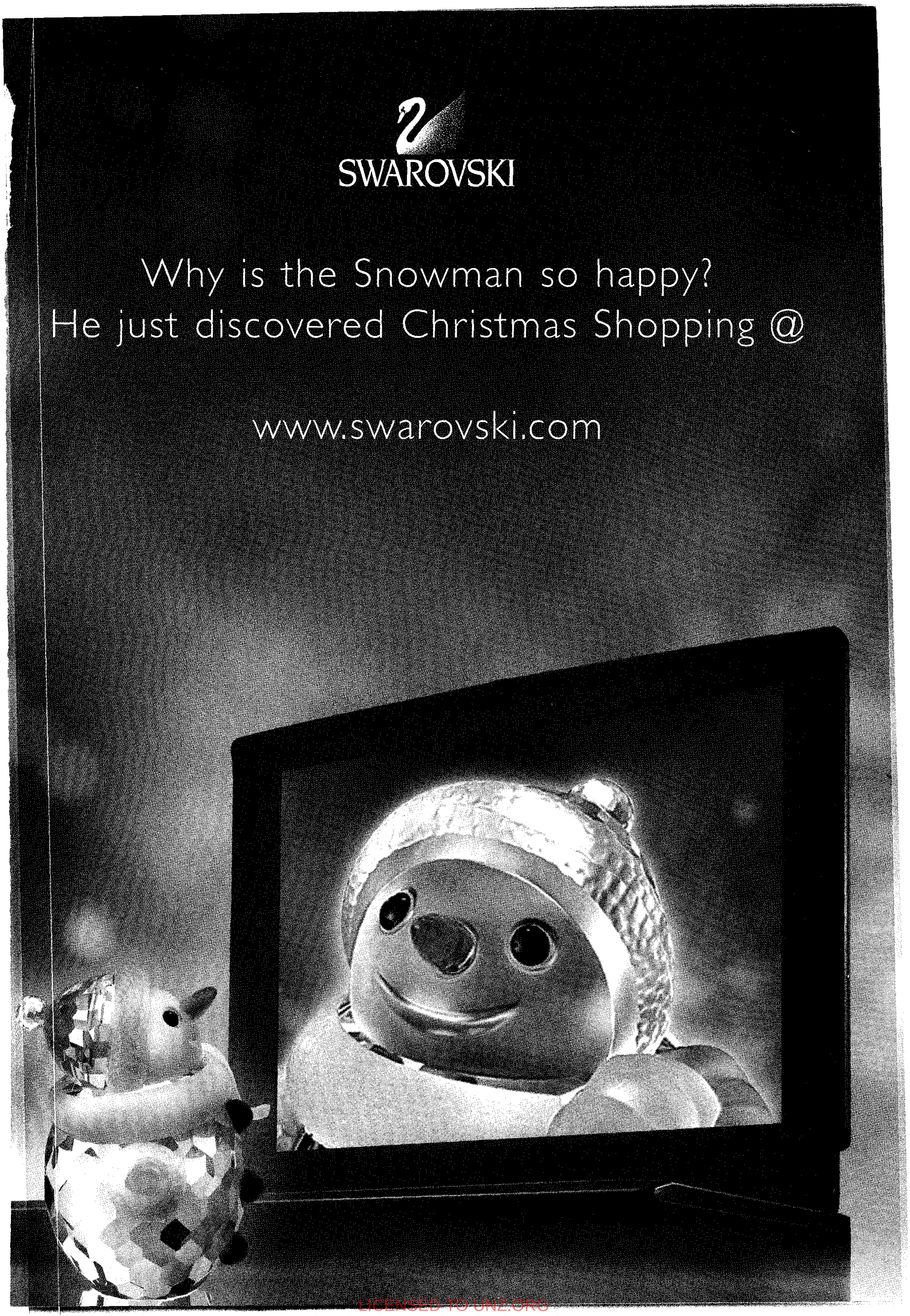
A GUY NAMED OSAMA

SPIKE LEE'S BIO-PIC, STARRING CHRISTOPHER WALKEN AS THE AL QAEDA LEADER, FOLLOWS BIN LADEN'S GROWING DISLIKE FOR THE U.S. WHILE HE EATS SOME HIDEOUS FAST FOOD.



THE ROAD TO FRESNO

BRUCE WILLIS AND HUGH GRANT ARE MISTAKEN FOR TERRORISTS WHEN THEY RENT A TRUCK. THEY END UP BEING CHASED BY THE U.S. AIR FORCE, A TRUCK-RENTAL EXECUTIVE (BILL MURRAY), AND CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR.


SWAROVSKI
Why is the Snowman so happy?
He just discovered Christmas Shopping @
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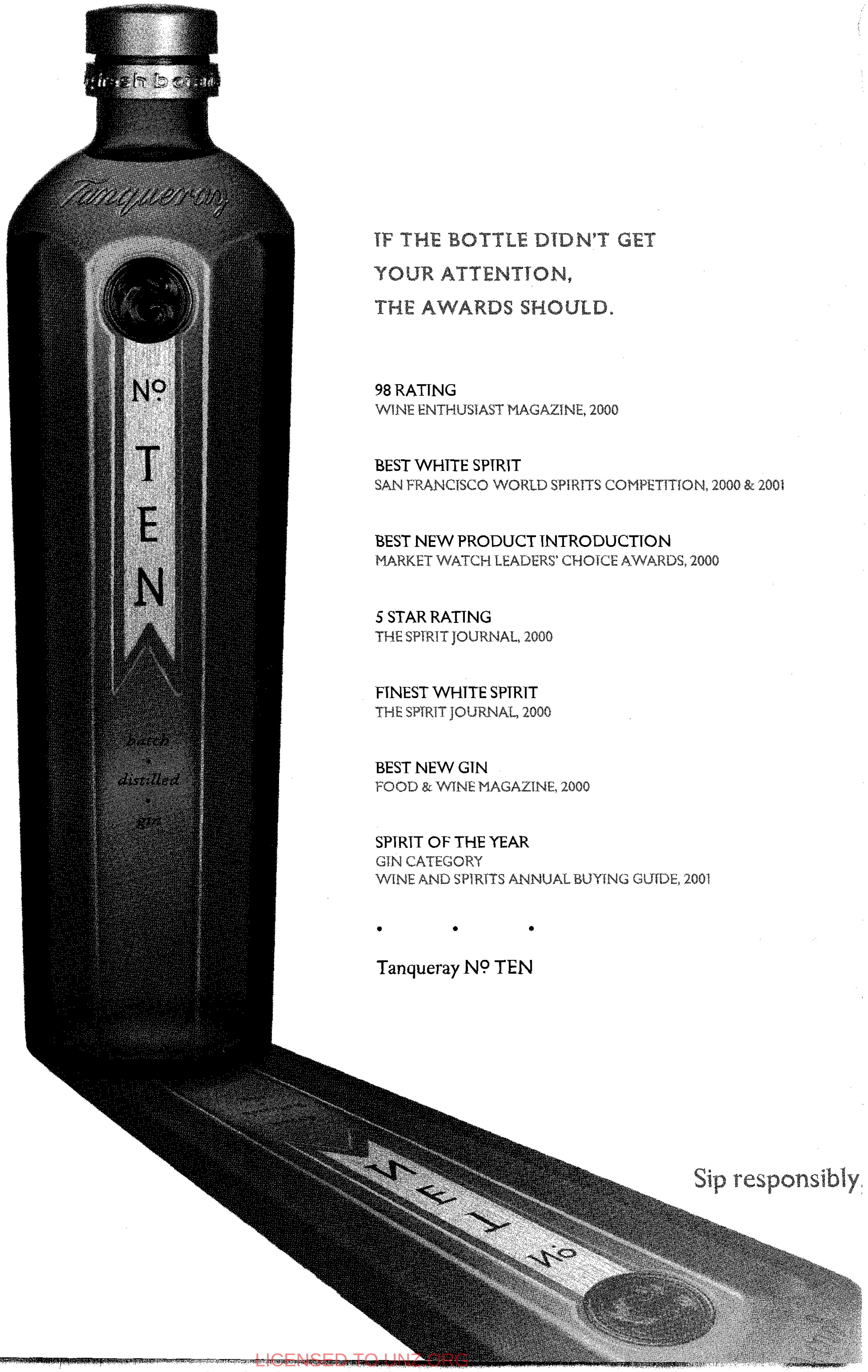

IF THE BOTTLE DIDN'T GET
YOUR ATTENTION,
THE AWARDS SHOULD.

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